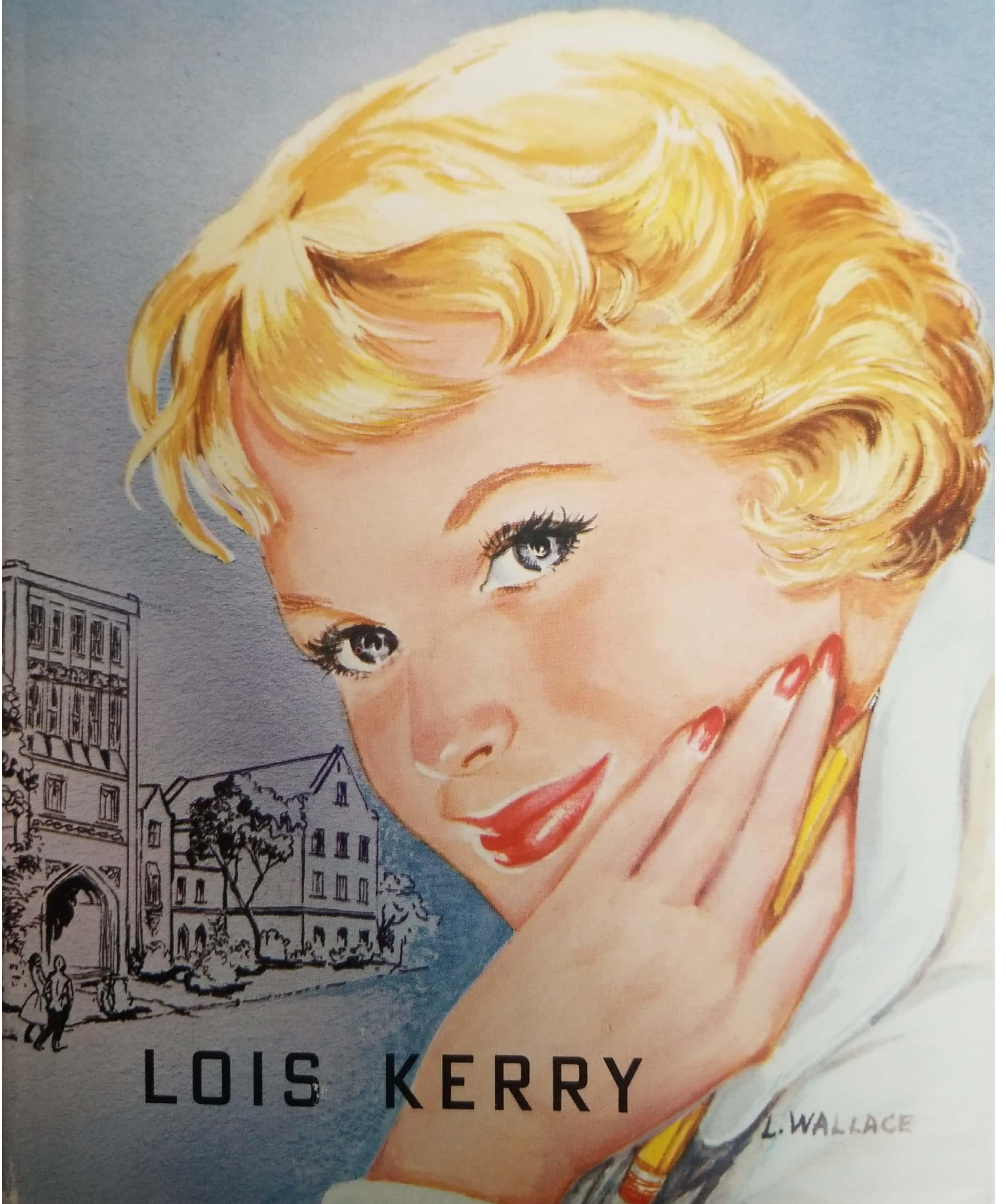
A PROMISE FOR JOYCE



LOIS KERRY

A Promise for Joyce

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Funk & Wagnalls Company New York

warm wishes -
"Lois Kerry"
aka Lois Duncan

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1

An Unexpected Phone Call

It's like living something all over again, Joyce thought as the cab pulled away, leaving her standing with her overnight case in her hand, gazing over the neat, green lawn to the brick dormitory. It's like seeing a movie a second time; you look at a scene and think, "I remember this; this all happened before, and it was exactly the same."

She started up the walk toward the dormitory. The September sun was warm through her light wool suit, and it still seemed more like summer than fall. Beyond the dormitory she could see the tops of the trees that lined the parking lot, and, further still, the tall, pointed roof of the music building. Looking past the lawn in front of her, she saw the lawns of the other brick dormitories, all neat and green, all moving with people—girls like herself with small overnight bags in their hands, little groups of boys who had wandered over from the boys' campus to greet old friends and look over the incoming freshmen, small clusters of parents who seemed oddly out of place in the young confusion of the scene.

Last year, Joyce thought, when I was a freshman, it was exactly the same. And yet . . .

Yet, it had been different. How different she had felt then, walking up to the dormitory steps, gripping the handle of her bag for dear life as though it were the only familiar thing left in her world. How huge the campus had seemed, how foreign and awesome and terrifying! How hesitant she had been about entering! But now . . .

"I can't wait," Joyce said aloud, quickening her pace until she was almost running, the bag banging awkwardly against her knee as she bounded up the final steps. "Three whole months of vacation! I wonder how everybody is and what they have been doing! Why didn't Stella answer my letter—did that red-headed boy really visit Betty during vacation—has anyone heard the details of Connie's wedding? And Jeff—is Jeff back yet? Stella should know, they're both from the same town and might even have driven down together."

She plunged through the door into the milling mass which was the front parlor.

The girl at the desk, who was busily going over a chart of room locations, looked up with a welcoming smile. "Joyce Reynolds! Hi, there! What a gorgeous tan!"

"Hi, Lyn! Gee, it's good to see you! How come you're working at the desk?"

"I applied for the job last year," Lyn explained, "for a little extra spending money. Now I wonder if it's worth it! I've never had so many things to do at once!" And a moment later she was enveloped in the clamor of a group of freshmen, all demanding to know their room numbers and whether there was anyone to help them carry up their luggage.

Joyce continued down the corridor and up the stairs to the second floor.

Last September, she thought, I walked this same way, but then it seemed so different. Everybody was yelling and shrieking just the way they are now, and they were nailing up pennants and sewing curtains and dragging around furniture, and I never felt so lonely in my life. But now—now it's like coming home!

"Joyce! Hello! How was your summer?" a freckled-faced girl called from an open doorway.

"Hi, Peggy! Just grand, but it's good to be back!"

"Peg spent the summer on a ranch!" called Peggy's roommate, Trish Nelson, a big-boned girl with a pleasantly gruff voice. "You should see her legs, they've actually turned bow!"

"You think that's bad?" shrieked a voice from across the hall. "Wait until you see me—close up, I mean! I spent the last two weeks of vacation in bed with chickenpox!"

Joyce laughed and waved in all directions, shoving her way through the piles of empty suitcases and hat boxes that lined the corridors, until she reached the door to her own room. She opened it, stepped inside, and closed it behind her, eliminating at least a portion of the excited confusion.

Coming into this room was like entering a calm harbor. Everything was neat and immaculate. By the side of the door were two empty suitcases, waiting to be taken downstairs for storage. The curtains at the windows were crisply pressed, a row of dresses hung neatly in one side of the narrow closet and the closet door stood open, revealing that a careful half of the closet space had been reserved for Joyce's belongings.

Joyce's roommate was sitting in a chair by the window, lost in her reading.

"Hi, there, Stell! Don't tell me you're studying already! That's pushing it pretty hard, even for you!"

Stella Thomas lowered her book and looked up, startled.

"Oh, hello, Joyce! No, I'm not studying, just passing time. Jeff had to get here early this semester for some kind of introductory program at the medical school, and if I wanted to ride down with him, I had to come too. So I've been here a full day already and I got all settled before anyone else arrived."

Stella was a serious girl with a thin face and a quiet, restrained manner. Last year, when she had met her for the first time, Joyce had been disappointed that she was not the bubbling, effervescent roommate with whom she had always imagined herself sharing college experiences. Now, however, she was amazed at the pleasure she felt in seeing Stella again.

She dumped her overnight case onto the floor and tumbled unceremoniously onto the unmade bed opposite Stella's neat one.

"What did you do with yourself all summer? I wrote you a note about a month ago, but I guess you didn't receive it."

"Yes, I did," Stella said, "and I loved hearing from you; all that swimming and boating you were doing sounded like heaven. I meant to answer it too, but I didn't have a chance. I was doing volunteer work at the hospital in the mornings, and in the afternoons I had a job."

"What kind of a job?" Joyce asked with interest. "Doing lab work or something?" Stella wanted to become a doctor, and that ambition was the driving force in her life.

"No," she said slowly, "I worked in a restaurant, waiting tables."

"In a restaurant!" Joyce was sincerely horrified. "But, Stella, for heaven's sake, why? That's an awful way to spend a vacation."

"You know our family situation," Stella said quietly. "My father is dead, and it's all Mother can do to take care of expenses at home, especially now that my sisters are in school. I have a scholarship here at Denton, but it's not enough to pay for meals and laundry and lab fees and all the little extra things that pile up."

"But couldn't you find some other kind of work?" Joyce asked. "Something that would fit into what you're interested in? Surely there are little jobs you could do around a doctor's office or in a hospital."

"Yes," Stella said wryly, "I worked in a hospital mornings for the experience, but it didn't pay much. And believe it or not, waiting tables pays pretty well! Especially when you're lucky with tips. Besides," and there was a note of humor in her voice, "I've really developed some muscles carrying trays this summer. More than you got, I bet, with all your water skiing!"

"Well, maybe so." Joyce hesitated and then asked the question she had been wanting to ask since the moment she entered the room. "How is Jeff?"

"Fine." Stella gave her a curious glance. "Didn't you hear from him this summer?"

"Well, yes, off and on. A couple of little notes. He said he was working for his father and learning the behind-the-scenes business of a doctor's office. But they were such short notes and he sounded so busy." Joyce kept her voice carefully casual. "You say you drove down with him?"

"Yes." Stella's sharp eyes saw through Joyce in an instant. She leaned over and laid a reassuring hand on her roommate's arm. "Look, Joyce, Jeff and I are old friends; we come from the same town. You know that. And you also know there's only one girl he cares about in any way except as a friend, and that's you."

"Do you honestly think so?" Joyce took a deep breath. "Last year was so messy, Stell; a lot of it wasted! All along I took Jeff for granted, hardly even noticing him. And then at the end of the year . . ." She felt herself blushing. "I know I'm being silly. It's just that there hasn't been a *chance* for any romantic kind of feeling to really get started, and—and I can't help worrying that maybe during the summer he's met somebody else or . . ."

"I can tell you right now that he hasn't," Stella said in her usual brisk manner. "The first thing he asked me when I got into the car was, 'What do you hear from Joyce?' "

There was a light rap at the door and before the girls had a chance to answer, it flew open and a tiny dark-haired girl burst in, rushing across the room to grab Joyce in an eager hug.

"Oh, Joyce, I've been waiting all day for you to get here! My, it's good to see you again! I have so much to tell you!"

"It's good to see you too, Betty," Joyce said warmly. "You look so pretty, so sort of sparkly! Has anything exciting happened?"

"It certainly has," Betty said delightedly, tossing herself onto Stella's freshly made bed to begin her story. Joyce glanced quickly at her roommate and caught her frown of irritation. Stella's neat, precise ways conflicted sharply with Betty's haphazard ones, and as a result they had never become really close friends.

"Come sit over here," Joyce said, gesturing to a place on her own bed which was still unmade. "Now, tell me —what's the story?"

"The story is," said Betty, not bothering to follow the suggestion of moving, "that I'm in love!"

"In love?" Joyce said with amusement. "Well, that's nothing new. You were in love all last year too, and you told me your boy friend was coming to visit you this summer."

"Oh, him!" Betty disposed of last year's romance with a shrug of her shoulders. "Oh, he's nothing. I don't know what I ever saw in him in the first place. His visit was the dullest week I've ever spent; there just wasn't anything to do with him. No, this is somebody else. His name is Tim Conway."

"Tim Conway." Joyce repeated. "That name sounds familiar. Is he a Denton student?"

"Yes, he's a senior this year and he's president of his fraternity, which is probably why his name sounds familiar. He's the handsomest thing you've ever seen, broad shoulders and curly hair and a deep, deep voice . . ."

"You know him, Joyce," Stella inserted quietly, taking part in the conversation for the first time. "He was at the Homecoming Dance last year with one of the Madison twins. They came in very late and he was pretty noisy. I think one of the chaperones made him leave. Remember?"

"That sounds like Tim," Betty exclaimed, her pretty face bright with laughter. "Honestly, he's a complete riot!"

"The Madison girl didn't think he was very funny," Stella said soberly. "I heard her talking to her sister afterwards, and she said she had never been so embarrassed in her whole life. She never dated him again."

"Well, I must say she was a pretty poor sport," Betty said shortly, the laughter dropping from her face. "Tim couldn't have meant any harm. He's been around a little bit more than most of the boys here at Denton. He thinks the school parties are kiddish, and he was probably just trying to stir things up a little. And I bet the reason the Madison girl didn't have another date with him is because he didn't ask her. Tim's so cute he could date *anybody*."

"He couldn't date *me*," Stella said coolly. "Not if he got down on his knees and begged me. The way he roars around in that silly-looking little car of his, you'd think the school parking lot was a race track. He's going to smash into somebody one of these days, and I'd hate to be the person with him when he does."

"That 'silly-looking little car', as you put it," Betty said angrily, "is known as a Porsche, and it's a very expensive sports car! And Tim is a wonderful driver! And you'll never have a chance to refuse a date with him, because he'll never ask you. He . . ."

"Where did you meet him, Betty?" Joyce cut in quickly, trying to turn the two girls' attention away from each other. "You didn't date him last year, did you?"

"No," Betty said, brightening again. "I was at a Country Club dance a couple of weeks ago, and Tim was there too with a friend of mine. She introduced us, and Tim and I found out we were both from Denton, and then he said he remembered me because I was a cheerleader, and—Well . . ." Her eyes grew dreamy. "It happened so fast! It seems impossible, doesn't it, that we could have gone to the same college all this time without meeting each other, and then should run into each other some place else?"

Joyce was just opening her mouth to answer when there was another rap at the door and Trish Nelson and Peggy Bennett burst in. Joyce took a quick look at Peggy's legs and exclaimed, "Why, they're not bowed the least bit!"

The red-haired girl burst out laughing. "Of course, they're not. That's just something my dear roommate is telling everybody. I think she's jealous because she didn't get to go to a ranch herself."

Trish sank down onto the floor, folding her long legs tailor fashion before her.

"I had a pretty exciting summer myself," she said good-naturedly in her odd, husky voice. "I stayed home and watched two of my sisters get married. Which reminds me, did any of you get to go to Connie Jones' wedding?"

"I did," Betty said. "In fact, I was a bridesmaid. It was a big wedding; the church was done in pink and white, and Connie wore a beautiful ivory satin wedding gown that had been her mother's and she looked like an angel!"

"I bet she did!" Joyce said. Her face softened as she thought of the tall, blonde girl with the sweet face and gentle manner who had been Betty's roommate the year before. Calm, patient Connie had been a friend to every one of them, and there was not a person who had not been thrilled with her over her engagement to Ray Basler, the boy she had gone with since high school, and over their marriage immediately after their graduation this past spring.

"I got an invitation," Trish said, "and would have loved to have gone, but one of my sisters' weddings hit just about the same time. I sent a present."

"So did I," said Peggy, "an adorable little cream-and-sugar set. I only wish she had lived close enough for me to make the trip."

"She seemed so happy," Betty said dreamily. "And she and Ray are so perfect together. It was just like the happy ending to a wonderful story."

"More like the beginning," Stella inserted crisply. "Marriage isn't an ending, you know; it's a beginning."

"Oh, for goodness' sake, Stella," Betty snapped irritably, "you don't have to jump on everything I say! You knew what I meant." She shifted her position on the bed, leaving a faint smudge where her shoes had brushed against the immaculate white spread. Stella moved as though to say something, thought better of it, and remained silent, but her eyes were cold.

My goodness, Joyce thought in surprise, what is this between these two? They seem to be rubbing each other the wrong way with every single thing they say or do.

Peggy seemed to have the same feeling, for she quickly changed the subject.

"Have any of you seen Kathy Meadows?"

"No." Joyce pounced gratefully upon the new subject. "Why?"

"She looks," Peggy said, "as though she's lost twenty pounds. You know how unattractive she was all last year? Well, you could never say that about her now. She's still not a beauty, of course, and there's an awful lot of fixing up she could do to herself, but the change is unbelievable. She hardly seems like the same girl. And she's friendlier too. She actually said hello to me when I passed her in the hall."

"Twenty pounds!" Trish exclaimed in disbelief. "Oh, come now, Peg."

"Well, fifteen pounds, maybe," Peggy admitted. "But it's made a wonderful difference. Wait until you see her and I bet you'll agree with me."

"204—JOYCE REYNOLDS—204—JOYCE REYNOLDS . . ." The loudspeaker in the hallway boomed out so loudly that the conversation was shattered. "TELEPHONE!"

"That speaker!" Betty exclaimed, laughing. "I'd forgotten during the summer how startling it could be! And who on earth would be calling you, Joyce, on our very first day here? Are you expecting anyone?"

"No," Joyce said, getting quickly to her feet. "That is, not exactly. I suppose it could be Jeff."

"You mean Jeff MacGreggor?" Betty's impish face brightened with interest. "The boy you dated off and on last year, when you weren't busy being in love with somebody else? I thought he graduated."

"He did," Joyce told her, "but he's still here. He's entering medical school."

"204—JOYCE REYNOLDS . . ." the speaker began again, more impatiently this time.

"Coming!" Joyce shouted back to it, slipping through the open door and starting at a brisk pace down the hall.

She hesitated when she reached the telephone. She found her hand was trembling slightly when she placed it on the receiver.

This is ridiculous, she told herself firmly. After all, it's just Jeff. I've talked to Jeff dozens of times. I've kidded with him, and I've cried on his shoulder, and I've broken dates with him because somebody more interesting asked me in the meantime.

But the picture of Jeff sprang up before her—his big and rangy frame, his steady brown eyes and square-cut chin, and the sprinkling of freckles across his nose. "Good old Jeff" she had called him last year. But at the end of the year, on their last date together, she had raised her eyes and found him looking at her, and somehow he had not been "good old Jeff" any longer. He had suddenly become somebody different, somebody to cause her hand to tremble now as she picked up the receiver.

She took a deep breath and made her voice low and casual.

"Hello."

"Hello. Is this Joyce Reynolds?" It was a masculine voice, but it was not Jeff's.

Joyce felt disappointment sweep over her like a flood. "Yes, I'm Joyce."

"This is Bill Johnson," the voice said, "assistant editor of the *Archive*. I'm calling for Ginny Boylston, the editor-in-chief."

"Oh." Joyce knew the *Archive*. It was the campus literary magazine, very old and well established. In fact, it had the reputation of being "the oldest college literary magazine in the South." It was put out painstakingly each month on the very finest quality paper and was sold in the student cafeterias and in the Dope Shop. Joyce could not remember ever seeing one of her friends buying it.

"It's arty," Betty had told her when she first started at Denton. "Not just arty, but ultra-arty." She had wrinkled her nose in disgust. "It's so highbrow that half the time you can't understand what the stories are supposed to be about. They all have double meanings, and most of them are so deep you can't even digest the titles. At least, *I* can't."

"But who writes them?" Joyce had asked with interest.

"The students," Betty had told her. "But it's a special little bunch of students, sort of an ultra-sophisticated clique. They always have stories by the same people, and the stories are all just alike, only in different ways."

After that Joyce had purchased several copies of the magazine out of curiosity and found Betty's description far from incorrect. She had waded through several of the stories and then given up.

Now she said, "Yes, I know the *Archive*. I read it last year."

"Well, we know you too." Bill Johnson's voice was warm and pleasant. "You're the girl who did the lyrics for last year's Pied Piper Show, aren't you?"

"Yes," Joyce said. She felt a little glow of pleasure that somebody remembered the past year's college musical. It had been such a let-down when the production was over and the brief flare of excitement had died down.

"We liked the lyrics," Bill said. "They were well done, very clever and professional, and what we'd like to know is whether you would be interested in being poetry editor of the *Archive*."

"Poetry editor?" Joyce couldn't believe her ears. "But I don't know the first thing about putting out a magazine."

"Oh, your job wouldn't be difficult," Bill said. "Ginny is editor, and she runs everything; all you'd have to do would be to follow along on what she tells you. We don't normally have sophomores on the staff, just juniors and seniors, but this year the boy who was going to be poetry editor changed schools on us, and we're suddenly left without one. I remembered the work you did on the Pied Piper and suggested to Ginny that we ask you."

"I'm very flattered," Joyce said. "I really am." She hesitated, not knowing what to say.

"Then it's settled?"

Joyce found herself liking the voice on the telephone, it was so full of warmth and energy. She tried to visualize the boy attached to it.

He's quick and efficient, she thought, and I bet he likes sports—things like basketball and tennis—and he's always dashing around somewhere.

Aloud she said, "Yes, thank you; I'd love to be poetry editor. Where do I go and what do I do to start?"

"You come to the *Archive* office tomorrow," Bill told her. "It's behind the English classrooms. Come early, say about nine, and Ginny and I will be there to show you the set-up."

"All right," Joyce said, a little overwhelmed by the whole thing. "I'll be there. And, thank you again."

She replaced the receiver on the hook and stood there a moment before starting back to her room and the gay group of girls waiting for her there.

She thought, that wasn't Jeff. The disappointment was still within her, dull and solid at the pit of her stomach.

I was sure Jeff would call the first day, but that wasn't Jeff. Still, an *Archive* phone call—that's a pretty exciting thing! Being poetry editor is something to get pretty excited about!

And at the same time, a funny nagging little thought mingled with her satisfaction—I wonder why Ginny Boylston, if she's the editor-in-chief, didn't bother to call me herself?

2

Poetry Editor

"Come to the *Archive* office," Bill Johnson had said, "it's behind the English classrooms."

The *Archive* office! Joyce had seen it in her mind as a modern building, neat and shiny, with an office full of desks in the front and a room full of presses behind, and the smell of printers' ink giving a romantic flavor to it all. It was with real disappointment that she found the little printed sign which hung at a tilt on the door beside the washroom at the back of the English building.

"Archive." She read it aloud. "Well, maybe it's better on the inside. You can't tell very much from the outside of a door."

The room behind the door, however, was if anything less alluring than the door itself. It was small and dingy and untidy, with several rows of chair-lined tables, and in the far corner, by the one window, a mammoth desk, littered with papers. Behind the desk, leaning intently over a stack of papers, was a girl, and a boy was seated near the doorway, pounding away furiously on a large, noisy typewriter.

It was the boy who looked up when Joyce came in. "Hi! Can I help you with anything?"

The friendly voice was the same one that had spoken to her over the telephone, and the boy himself was exactly as Joyce had visualized him, lean and wiry looking with a quick, efficient manner, and a sandy crew cut over a quizzical face.

She said, "You must be Bill Johnson."

"And you're Joyce Reynolds; I recognize your voice. You're right on the dot of nine too. I can see you're going to be worth your weight in gold as an editor. Most editors never get anywhere on time!"

He grinned at her, and it was the kind of grin that made you want to grin back at him. Joyce decided she liked him very much.

"What do I do first?" she asked.

"First, I guess you'd better talk to the boss. That's her, at the big desk. Hey, Ginny, this is Joyce Reynolds, our new poetry editor!"

The girl at the desk raised her head and regarded Joyce without enthusiasm.

"Our new poetry editor? You mean you've gone ahead and signed up somebody without even telling me?"

"What do you mean, without telling you?" Bill exclaimed. "We've been hashing it over for days now. I've told you a dozen times I wanted to talk to the Reynolds girl about handling the poetry. You've been stalling around, but you haven't been able to come up with anybody else who could handle the job. And now we've got our backs against the wall with our first issue going to press next week, and we can't fool around any longer."

"So you went ahead and asked her?"

"Sure, I asked her," Bill said. "Here she is. And I'll bet my bottom dollar she's going to do a great job."

Joyce shifted uncomfortably. She resented being talked about as though she were an inanimate piece of furniture, being handed from one to the other. Now, bracing herself, she walked over to the desk and gazed down into the girl's face.

"Look," she said evenly, "Bill phoned me about this job; I didn't phone him. I agreed to work on the *Archive* because he asked me to. If you don't want me, say so, and I'll walk right out again. It really doesn't mean that much to me, one way or the other."

Even as she said it, she knew she did not mean the words. It did matter to her. She did want to work on the *Archive*—very much.

The girl before her leaned back in her chair. She was a thin girl ("thin," Joyce told Stella later, "to the point of being skinny") with short, dark hair, cut in a boyish way, and heavy, horn-rimmed glasses. She reached up now and took off the glasses, and Joyce could see that her eyes were clear and gray and quite lovely.

"It's not that I don't want you," she said now, addressing Joyce for the first time. "I mean, I have nothing against you personally; I don't even know you. The thing that Bill and I have been arguing is your qualifications. He seems to feel that since you did the Pied Piper lyrics that proves you're an authority on poetry. I don't agree. Truly, I don't see the slightest connection between cute, even clever, lyrics in a college musical and the type of poetry the *Archive* publishes."

"It's not going to hurt the *Archive* any," Bill said firmly, "to have a light touch once in a while. Besides, Joyce didn't just turn out 'cute lyrics.' Some of the ballads in that show were beautiful."

"Well, you two fight it out," Joyce said, really angry now. "I've got plenty of things I can be doing. If you decide you want me for poetry editor, you can call me, and then *I'll* tell *you* whether or not I'm still interested."

She turned abruptly and started for the door.

From behind her she heard Bill's voice.

"Hey, Joyce, wait a minute! Don't go storming out of here mad! Ginny's being difficult—that's just the way she is—but if you'll hang on a minute . . ."

"I'm not interested in hanging on a minute, thank you," Joyce said icily, fumbling with the handle of the door.

There was an odd sound behind her, a thudding noise and then a whirr of wheels on the wooden floor, and an instant later, so quickly that it did not seem possible, an arm went around her waist and spun her back into the center of the room.

"I said wait," Bill Johnson said, laughing, "and I meant it! I have to put up with one temperamental female here because she's editor-in-chief, but I'm darned if I'm going to work with two of them!"

Joyce gazed at him numbly, unable to believe what she saw. The chair in which Bill had been seated was not merely a chair but a wheel chair, and now he spun himself expertly around to a position opposite Ginny.

"Okay, Ginny," he said briskly in a no-nonsense voice, "you're boss and have the final say-so. We've got an issue to put out next week. We need a poetry editor. Here's a gal who'll make a good one. If you have somebody else to offer, say so; if not, let's apologize to Joyce and hope she's not so mad she's going to walk out on us."

Ginny hesitated. For a moment Joyce thought she was going to snap back with some unpleasant retort. But suddenly her face softened and, to Joyce's amazement, she got up and held out her hand.

"I'm sorry, Joyce," she said. "Billy and I are always having rows, and we certainly shouldn't have made you take the brunt of this one. I don't know of anybody else who would make a good poetry editor. I hope you'll forgive me for being so rude and accept the position."

"All right," Joyce said awkwardly, taking the outstretched hand with a feeling that this preliminary greeting was long overdue. "I'll be glad to accept it."

"Fine." Ginny withdrew her hand and glanced at her watch. "I'd like to stay and show you the ropes, but I've got a ten o'clock class and I'm late for it now. I'll let Bill do the honors in my place; he can tell you what you'll have to do as well as I can. I'm here every morning from nine to almost ten and usually all afternoon except on lab days, so if you need to ask me anything, just drop by."

"All right," Joyce said again. She stood watching Ginny until the door closed behind her and then turned back to Bill.

"Don't mind Ginny," he said, swinging his chair around into its original position behind the table. "She gets crazy ideas sometimes about an editor's responsibilities; she seems to think the magazine's got to be a junior type *Atlantic Monthly*. But she's a pretty nice kid underneath it all. I'm sure she didn't mean to hurt your feelings."

"I guess I shouldn't have gotten so mad," Joyce said, carefully focusing her eyes on Bill's face instead of the wheel chair. She was painfully conscious of the chair's existence, all steel and chrome and shiny wheels, and she kept feeling uncomfortably compelled to glance down at it. It seemed so impossible for this boy to be sitting in it. He looked so completely normal, so healthy and energetic and happy-go-lucky, with his crew cut and easy grin and friendly blue eyes.

He seemed to read her mind.

"I had polio," he said, "six years ago. That's the 'why for' for this buggy. Don't let it bother you. After you've been around a while you'll forget it's here."

"It doesn't *bother* me," Joyce said awkwardly. "I was just surprised, that's all. I—I hadn't realized."

"It's no real problem," Bill said easily, "except for steps, and then I can usually find somebody to haul me up and down. Do you have a little time to spare? If so, you might as well look around the office and I'll give you a briefing on how we put this magazine together."

It was ten-thirty when Joyce finally shut the door of the *Archive* office behind her and started down the walk toward the quadrangle. Glancing at her watch, she remembered that her first class was not until eleven. Normally she would have a ten o'clock class first, but that had been cancelled for this day in order to give a few more students time to register.

Over half an hour, she thought, and nothing to do. There's really no sense going back to the dormitory. I suppose I could walk over to the bookstore and see if the Spanish books have come in yet.

Her eyes followed the long stretch of sidewalk before her, and then strayed off sideways to the neat, green quadrangle. The bookshop was directly opposite, and it was only a few yards across.

"Oh, well," she decided impulsively, "nothing to lose!" and struck out across the lawn.

She had gotten only a few paces from the sidewalk when a voice roared from behind her, "What do you think you're doing, young lady! Don't you know students are not permitted to trample down the grass!"

"I'm sorry, sir. I . . ." Joyce whirled, her face crimson with guilt, and then burst out laughing. "Jeff! You scared me half to death; I was sure it was the dean shouting at me! Oh, Jeff, it's good to see you!"

In a couple of long strides Jeff MacGreggor was beside her, catching her arm and propelling her quickly across the grassy area to the sanctuary of the sidewalk beyond.

"And it's good to see you too, even if I did catch you breaking rules your very first day of classes!" He smiled down at her, his brown eyes warm. "How are you, Joyce? It seems like years since I saw you last."

"I'm fine," Joyce said, "and it seems like years to me too."

Looking up at him, she thought, how tall he is! How very tall!

Of course, she had known he was tall. But somehow during the summer she had forgotten the overpowering bigness of him, the long ranginess, the feeling of being tiny and delicate and protected when she was with him.

"Where are you going?" he was asking now, his hand still on her arm. "Wherever it is, I'll walk you over."

"To the bookshop," Joyce said, "but I don't really have to go there today. I don't think they have the book I need anyway."

"How about coffee then?" Jeff asked. "We're standing right in front of the Dope Shop."

"I'd like that."

Walking beside him, Joyce was very conscious of the way he walked, of the familiar, long-legged stride deliberately shortened so she could keep up with him, of the hand still casually on her arm in a friendly, comradely fashion which could mean affection or could be nothing more than the gesture of any boy steering a girl into a drugstore for coffee. She could feel the quickening of her own pulse.

This is silly, she told herself. After all, I've walked with Jeff before. Last year he was always around waiting to take me some place, and I never felt like this then.

After they had found a booth and ordered coffee, Jeff leaned back in his seat and studied her in silence a moment.

Then he said, "You look nice. You cut your hair during the summer, didn't you? And you have a good tan."

"Yes, I spent the whole summer on the beach," Joyce told him. "My brother Randall got a pair of water skis for his birthday and tried to teach me how to use them. I think I spent more time outside than I did in."

"Lucky girl." Jeff shook his head. "Your roommate had a tough summer. Did she tell you about it?"

"She told me she worked in a hospital in the morning," Joyce said, "and had a job waiting tables in the afternoon."

"Not just the afternoon," Jeff said, "but half the night! She was working in an all-night diner close to my dad's office. I was helping him this summer, sitting in on his diagnoses, cleaning up after him, and being general handy man for the sake of the experience. One night Dad had an emergency call; one of his patients' kids fell out of a crib and landed on his head on a hard wood floor. I went out with Dad and afterward we stopped by the diner for coffee before going home. Stella was still there working. It must have been about two in the morning."

"She didn't tell me that," Joyce said. She dumped some sugar into her coffee and stirred it thoughtfully. "Stella never tells me anything. I don't know what it is exactly; we're friends, we get along, but we just don't seem to have the same relationship other roommates do. Last year with Connie and Betty, for instance—they were inseparable. They did everything together and told each other everything; they were just like sisters."

"Stella's not like Betty," Jeff said slowly. "I don't think she'd ever tell anybody everything, no matter how good a friend it was. That doesn't mean she doesn't like you. I think she does. Very much."

"I hope so," Joyce said. "I like her, even if she is so sort of serious." She took a gulp of coffee. "I bet it will seem strange to Betty this year with Connie married and gone. She doesn't even have a roommate. She's all alone in that double room."

"It'll do her good," Jeff said unsympathetically, "to get along on her own for a while." He glanced at his watch. "Say, if you're making an eleven o'clock, we'd better get going. Is it back on the girls' campus?"

"No," Joyce said, "it's biology, over here in the science building. It's a freshman course really, but I didn't take it last year. I guess I thought if I put it off long enough it might go away, but it didn't."

"Biology? It's fascinating." Jeff laughed at her. "What are you wrinkling your nose for?"

"Don't tell me how nice it is," Joyce said, "cutting up dead cats and seeing how they're put together. Ugh! I don't know how I'm going to live through it." She set down her coffee cup and got up.

"If you think that's bad," Jeff said, "you should see the skeleton I'm going to be working on in med school. His name's Morton and he even has fillings in his teeth."

He got up too, tossed some change onto the counter, and held open the door.

"I'd like to walk you over, Joyce, but I've got an eleven o'clock too, and it's in the opposite direction. I don't think I can make it to the science building and all the way back again in time."

"That's all right," Joyce said quickly, surprised at the weight of her disappointment. "It was good seeing you, Jeff, even for a little while. I—I wondered . . ." She hesitated, and then let the words come out in a rush so she would not have a chance to weigh them and hold them back. "I wondered—that is—I thought you would probably phone last night. I mean, you knew I'd be getting here yesterday and—and it's been so long since we've seen each other . . ."

She broke off, horrified by the wistfulness of her own voice.

I didn't mean it to sound like that, she thought. So possessive and injured.

But Jeff didn't seem to take it that way. When he answered, it was casually.

"I did think of calling, but I went out to Aldo's for spaghetti with some of the guys, and by the time I got back it was past phone hours. I was hoping I'd run into you on campus today."

"Well, you did."

Joyce paused. She thought, now is the time for him to ask me for a date. It doesn't have to be a big date. Just "how about dinner someplace tonight?" or "what about a movie next week-end?" Just something to show me he wants to see me, the way he did last year.

But Jeff was glancing at his watch again.

"Five minutes," he said. "We'd better run."

"Okay." Joyce put out her hand and touched his sleeve. "Don't—don't get to be a stranger, Jeff."

He gave her an odd, half-startled look. Then his brown eyes softened.

"You never have to worry about that, Joyce," he said gently.

They were not the right words, but they were better than nothing. Joyce breathed a sigh of relief as she turned away and started down the walk to the biology classroom.

3

Betty Heads for Trouble

The dormitory was dark and quiet and, bent intently over the desk with a lamp focused on the sheet of paper in front of her, Joyce was writing a poem.

Not just writing it, she thought, searching for the words she needed. Creating it. You *write* themes and term papers, you just sit down and knock them out sentence after sentence, page after page, until they're done. There's no real creative effort to something like that. But a poem—a poem comes from inside you—you have to live with a poem.

When she had come up to her room after dinner that evening, she had no intention of writing anything. She had her Spanish book and yesterday's biology notes all laid out on the desk to study, along with a sheaf of papers Ginny Boylston had given her at the *Archive* office that morning.

"Here," she had said, "is your first batch of poetry. Our student poets have come through this month and there must be ten or twelve poems here. I'm also including some notes about our page lay-outs. We use the poems for fillers, you know, so you'll have to take into consideration the number of lines in relationship to the spaces they're to fit into."

"You mean, it's more important to choose a poem that's the right length than to have a really good one?" Joyce asked in surprise.

"Of course not," Ginny told her. "It's just that sometimes you have to select between several equally good poems, and in that case it doesn't hurt to pick one that fits. Of course, we can do some adjusting on our end too and juggle the stories around if it's necessary to leave more space."

Joyce took the papers that were thrust into her hand. "Have you read these yourself?"

"No," Ginny said, "but there should be some good ones. Most of them are by our regular contributors. Read them over and make your selections, and let me check them over as soon as possible."

So the papers had come home and they, as well as the homework assignments, were awaiting Joyce on her desk when she came upstairs after dinner.

"I should study first," she said to Stella, who was already settled on her bed with a pile of books. "But I can't help it, I've just got to look these poems over. I feel so important being poetry editor that I can't wait to start editing!"

She stacked the pile of papers neatly on the desk before her, lifted the top one, and settled back in her chair to read it. As she read, her expectant expression changed to a frown of annoyance.

"Whoever wrote this," she said aloud, "must be a crank of some kind. He couldn't be serious." Without bothering to finish it she tossed the paper to one side and picked up another.

A moment later she laid that too aside and picked up a third.

"Stella," she said in an odd voice, "excuse me for interrupting you, but I want you to listen to this." She cleared her throat and began to read.

Down, down, down,
Bleeding, breaking, snagging himself against the barbed
edges of time,
He goes;
Screaming with pain, with terror,
Into the deep, red mouth of Tomorrow.

She read it solemnly and then raised her eyes to meet Stella's.

"What do you think of it?"

Stella regarded her quizzically. "Are you kidding, Joyce? Is that really one of the poems?"

Joyce nodded. "What do you think of it?" she asked again.

"I think it's insane," Stella said flatly.

"Thank goodness," Joyce breathed in relief. "I was afraid maybe *I* was the one who was crazy for not understanding it. This is by somebody named Bryan Parkley. Ginny's jotted down on the margin that he's their chief contributor."

"Well, maybe this was an off day for him," Stella said. "You don't have to use that, do you? Don't you have other poems to select from?"

"Yes," Joyce said, "but these first two are equally weird. One of them is written without any capitalization or punctuation, and the other is almost two pages long, and I can't get past the second line." She reached over and picked up a fourth sheet of paper. As she read it her frown softened. "This one isn't so bad. It's got a nice swing to it, and it rhymes, and you can understand it. Would you like to read it?"

She handed the paper to Stella who scanned it quickly and nodded.

"Yes, this is nice. It's by Edwina Ryan. Is she a regular contributor too?"

"If she were," Joyce said, "I think Ginny would have noted it on the margin the way she did with the Parkley person. Oh, and here's another regular," as she caught sight of the notation on the margin of the next poem. "This is called 'Eternal Quest' and it starts:

> *Fear not the hand which strikes, the power which quells*
> *All helpless things, alas, fear nothing else*
> *Save him who comes, head down, eyes turned away . . .*

"Enough!" Stella said pleadingly, pressing her hands over her ears. "I can't take any more! If you're going to read those things, do it silently!"

"I not only have to read them," Joyce said helplessly, "I have to choose four of them for the next issue of the *Archive* and get them in to Ginny by tomorrow. Heaven knows how I'm going to do it if they're all like this."

Silence settled over the room. Stella turned a page of her book. Joyce finished another poem and laid it aside. Then she read still another. Hesitating a moment, she laid this one aside with the poem she had liked and picked up another. She finished this and tossed it quickly onto the first pile.

When she had finally finished the stack of papers, she pushed the larger pile to the back of her desk and reread the small one. Out of this she selected three poems, checked over the sheet of paper on which Ginny had written the space requirements and read the poems again. Finally she sighed.

"These three will do," she said. "Two of them are quite good, and the third is passable. But these others," gesturing toward the large pile, "are unbelievable! It's as though they were written in another language!"

"I thought you had to have four," Stella said, emerging momentarily from behind her book.

"I do," Joyce said, "The fourth has to be twelve lines. There are two twelve-line poems in this pile, but I just *can't* use them. One is 'The Death of Hope' and the other 'Lost Tomorrows.' I wish somebody would write a nice, simple verse about something normal. Springtime or sunshine or the seashore. These deep, dark thoughts are enough to weigh you down completely."

"Well, write one yourself," Stella suggested. "After doing all the Pied Piper lyrics last year, it shouldn't be too hard for you to do twelve lines about the seashore. Especially since you come from Florida and have been living near the beach all your life."

"I could, I guess," Joyce said thoughtfully. "There is something I've noticed since coming back to college. It's how quiet everything is. I mean, after the lights are off and the dorm has settled down and there's no more talking and laughing, it's dead silent. At home you could always hear the ocean. I think I could write a poem about that."

"Well, go ahead," Stella said. "I'm sure whatever you do will be better than those samples you've been reading to me. Now, please, let's not talk for a while. I've just got to get this chapter read and outlined."

"All right," Joyce agreed. She fumbled in her desk drawer and drew out a pencil and a sheet of paper. At the top she wrote the title "Moving Inland," and then, after a moment, changed it to, "A Child, Moving Inland." She sat holding the pencil and staring at the blank paper for a long time. Then she began to write.

It was much later when she finally scribbled the last of the twelve lines and leaned back in her chair to read over her work.

"She lived by the sea—" she read softly, forming the words soundlessly with her lips so as not to waken Stella who had long since finished her chapter and turned off her light.

She lived by the sea for so many years
That she stopped noticing long ago

The swish of water against the rocks
And the cry of gulls when the tide was low.

She never heard when she lay in bed
The sea wind whispering past our door,
Or the constant murmuring all night long
Of restless waves on a sandy shore.

It's only since we have come away . . .

Suddenly, breaking the silence of the room, came a loud click against the window. Joyce jumped, letting the paper slip from her fingers onto the desk.

"What on earth . . ." she began in amazement.

As if in answer to her question, there was a thump against the screen.

Joyce got quickly to her feet and crossed to the window. She pressed her face to the screen and stared into the darkness below. She thought she could make out the outline of someone standing there, a dark blur against the darkness of the grass.

"Who is it?" she called softly.

"Joyce?" The voice that floated up to her was thin and shaky. "Is that you?"

"Yes, it is." Joyce strained to see the figure more clearly. "It's not *Betty,* is it?"

"Yes." Now Joyce could recognize Betty's voice. "I'm locked out."

"Locked out! For heaven's sake, how did that happen?"

"I'll tell you later. I don't want to wake up the whole dormitory. Come down and let me in!"

"But where—how . . ." Joyce thought quickly of the big front door which opened right next to the housemother's suite, and the two side doors with bright floodlights over them. "Somebody would be sure to see us."

"Go down to the parlor," Betty hissed impatiently, "and unlock a window. Don't turn on any lights! And please, please hurry!"

There was a movement in the shadows below, and with that the figure was gone.

"Locked out!" Joyce whispered to herself. "Of all crazy things! And wouldn't you know it would be Betty!"

She glanced across at Stella, still sleeping soundly. She had pulled a pillow across her face to shut out the glow of Joyce's desk lamp, and it had evidently shut out the sound of voices as well, for she was still breathing deeply and regularly. Joyce cocked the lamp low over the desk so as to throw as little light as possible when she opened the door. Then, taking a deep breath, she slipped out into the hall.

She need not have worried about the light, for the hall was not dark. She had forgotten the dim lights which glowed all night to make it easy for the girls to get back and forth to the washroom.

Anyone who saw me in the hall would think that was where I was going, Joyce thought.

At the end of the hall she descended the stairs to the first floor and followed the hallway to the door to the parlor. Here her heart began to beat more quickly, for the housemother's suite was directly across from the parlor and it was well known among the girls that she was a light sleeper. As luck would have it, however, the parlor door was already standing ajar, and there was no need to make noise fumbling with the knob. It took only a tiny shove to push it the rest of the way open, and Joyce was in the parlor, crossing to the window.

In this room there were no lights at all, and Joyce knew it would be dangerous to turn one on, for anyone seeing a light blazing in the parlor in the middle of the night would be sure to investigate. Stumbling, bumping clumsily against chairs and tables, she fumbled her way across the room.

I've been here so many times in the daytime, she thought, I should know just where everything is! But at night it all seems so different!

A moment later her hand came in contact with the opposite wall. She moved it a few inches and found the window. The window was already raised, and it took only an instant to locate the latch on the screen and push it aside. The screen itself remained stubbornly in place.

"Joyce?" Betty's voice was so close Joyce was startled. "Do you have it unlatched?"

"Yes," Joyce whispered, "but the screen won't swing out. I think it must be warped."

"Well, shove it!" Betty's voice was shaky. "I've *got* to get in! You know how strict the dean is about the curfews at the girls' dormitories! I could get tossed out of college!"

The note of panic in her voice was so unusual for lighthearted Betty that Joyce found her own heart beating harder. Placing her hands at either edge of the wooden framework, she threw her whole weight against the screen. For an instant it held firm; then, with a suddenness which took Joyce's breath away, it shot outwards. There was a creaking sound and a sudden snap, and the entire screen plunged out into the darkness and thumped noisily to the ground.

There was an instant of dead silence. Then a light went on in the room above. With a gasp of horror, Betty pulled herself up level with the window sill. She scrambled upwards, getting a knee over. Joyce caught her under the arms and pulled, and both girls tumbled onto the floor.

"Come on," Betty whispered, getting up and starting toward the door. "We've got to get out of here fast! The whole dormitory is going to be down here in another minute!"

She started across the room toward the doorway, ran full tilt into a table edge, and reeled back against Joyce.

"It's so dark!" she gasped.

"Come on," Joyce whispered, catching her hand. "I got oriented coming in. Just follow me."

Pulling Betty behind her, she reached the door and plunged out into the hallway.

Once in a lighted area, the two girls broke into a run. They reached the stairs at the end of the building without running into anyone, but when they were half-way up they met Trish Nelson.

"Did you hear it?" she asked them breathlessly. "That crash? It sounded as though it came from directly below our window!"

"We—we were just down there investigating," Betty answered, pressing close behind Joyce. "We didn't see anything!"

A door opened and closed in the hallway below them.

"Somebody else must be checking up on it." Trish said excitedly. "I wonder what's happened!"

She continued down the stairs, and Joyce and Betty, with sighs of relief, reached the second floor and, an instant later, closed the door of Betty's room behind them.

"Thank goodness!" Betty gasped, collapsing onto her bed. "I feel as though I'd been through a wringer. I've never been so scared in all my life."

Joyce's own legs felt like rubber. She located the desk chair and sank into it.

"It was that screen," she said. "The hinges breaking like that. It sounded as though the whole wall was coming down."

"And it fell right on top of me!" Betty exclaimed. "I went flat on the ground. It was like being hit by a ton of bricks. It was all I could do to get up again and crawl in the window."

They sat in silence a moment while their breathing eased and their hearts slowed down to a more normal pace. After a moment Betty said, "Do you think Trish noticed anything?"

"What do you mean?"

"That you were wearing pajamas but I was wearing a date dress. And that we were already coming back from the crash when she hadn't even had time to get down there. It doesn't take a brain to figure out the whole story, and Trish is a smart gal."

"If she does figure it out, she won't say anything," Joyce said with certainty. "Trish is a good friend." She hesitated and then said, "What *is* the whole story, Betty? What were you doing out so long past curfew?"

"Just riding around," Betty said. "There's an old dirt road out on the other side of the Denton Woods where Tim sometimes races his car. He was showing me how fast it would go. Tim knows all about cars, and he's as proud of that Porsche as though he'd made it himself."

"Isn't it pretty dangerous, speeding around on dirt roads," Joyce asked hesitantly. "Especially at night?"

"Not with Tim," Betty said, "he's such a wonderful driver. Oh, he's such an exciting person, Joyce! I'm crazy about him! I've never felt this way about a boy before!"

"And what about him?" Joyce asked. "Does he feel the same way about you?"

"I don't know." The happiness dropped a little from Betty's voice. "He's never told me. Sometimes I wish I hadn't let him see how I feel about him. It makes him take me too much for granted. You were awfully smart last year, Joyce, the way you handled Jeff. You kept him dangling while you acted interested in other fellows. He never got too sure of you. That's why you have him eating out of your hand today."

"I don't have him 'eating out of my hand'," Joyce said indignantly. "What a horrid way of putting it! And I never tried to 'handle' Jeff. I've always been honest with him. When I acted interested in other boys it was because I *was* interested in them, not just to make Jeff jealous."

"Well, regardless of why you did it, it worked."

Joyce started to answer and then decided to let the subject drop. She said instead, "You'd better keep track of time next time, Bets. If I hadn't been awake to hear your pebbles against the window, you'd have been in real trouble."

Betty nodded. "You'll never know how glad I was to see your face at that window! When I saw a light in your room, I was worried sick it might be Stella. That would really have finished things."

"Stella wouldn't have reported you," Joyce said. And then added, more truthfully, "At least, I don't think she would have."

"Well, she wouldn't have gone down to open the window," Betty retorted. "It's all very fine for a person to want to become a doctor, and I admire Stella for it, but I don't see why she has to let it make such a stick-in-the-mud of her. She never goes anywhere or does anything, just sits with her nose in a book all day. I bet she's never been in love, the way I am with Tim."

There was such adoration in the girl's voice that Joyce stirred uncomfortably in the darkness. Being in love was nothing new as far as Betty was concerned. This pretty, bright-faced girl with her friendly smile and carefree manner had kept the dormitory jumping the year before with one gay romance after another. But then she had had Connie for a roommate—stable, level-headed Connie who could put out a restraining hand and pull her back down to earth. Never last year had she known Betty to behave like this.

"I've got to go," Joyce said, getting up. "It's almost one-thirty, and I've got an eight o'clock class tomorrow. Besides, if Stella wakes up and finds I'm not in the room I'll have to tell her the whole story."

"Oh, you mustn't do that!" Betty exclaimed in horror. She sprang up from the bed and caught Joyce's arm in a frantic gesture. "Please, please, Joyce. No matter what happens, whatever Stella says, no matter how much commotion they make over that broken screen, promise me you won't tell about tonight! If the dean ever found out, I'd be confined to campus for the rest of the year! Then Tim would find himself another girl!"

Joyce was startled by the panic in the girl's voice.

"All right, all right," she said soothingly, "I promise. I won't tell anybody. You don't have to worry, Betty; I won't tell."

And she thought, oh, dear, I do wish Connie were still here!

4

A Magic Evening

"ARCHIVE."

The little printed sign was just as unimpressive as it had been before, but this time when she looked at it Joyce felt a thrill of pride and possessiveness. She was no outsider now, advancing toward the *Archive* office for the first time. She was an editor; she belonged here. She was part of the *Archive*, and the little sign hanging at a tilt across the door no longer signified a crowd of awesome, unknown people—it meant her.

"Joyce Reynolds, Poetry Editor," she whispered to herself, swinging the door open and entering the room. "I wonder if that's the way it will read on the page where they list the editors. Or maybe they run it the other way around—Poetry Editor, Joyce Reynolds."

The inside of the room was the same as it had been the first time, dingy and untidy and cluttered, but today there was a different feeling about the place, an atmosphere of quiet activity. Girls were working busily at several of the tables, one with a typewriter and the others with rulers and sheets of paper. Toward the back of the room a solemn-faced boy was bent intently over a drawing board, and at the table next to his Bill Johnson was talking with another boy who held several sheets of handwritten copy in his hand. As before, Ginny Boylston was seated at her desk in the corner, her short dark hair pushed forward over her forehead as though she had been running her fingers through it. She was frowning down at something on the desk.

As Joyce drew nearer, Ginny glanced up at her.

"Hello, Joyce. I'm sorry I wasn't here this morning when you stopped by."

The words were polite enough, but there was no welcoming smile on Ginny's face. For an instant Joyce was perturbed; then she shrugged her shoulders. "Don't mind Ginny," Bill Johnson had said. "She's just being difficult; that's the way she is sometimes."

Well, let her be moody then, Joyce thought. I don't care. It's not as though I had to work right next to her all the time the way Bill does.

"That's all right," she said pleasantly. "All I wanted was to give you the poems for the next issue. When you weren't here I left them on your desk."

"I found them," Ginny said. "I'm reading them now."

Glancing down at the desk, Joyce recognized the little pile of papers she had left there earlier. They were spread out in a row, taking up most of the desk top. With a touch of uneasiness whe realized that they must have been what Ginny was frowning at when she came in.

"Are they—" Joyce asked hesitantly, "are they—all right?"

"Well," Ginny began slowly. She glanced down at the poems again and then raised her eyes to meet Joyce's. "Some of them are. They're not exactly what I would have chosen myself, but they're all right."

"Some of them," Joyce repeated. "Then there are some that *aren't* all right?"

"Yes." Ginny looked uncomfortable. "The poem about the seashore, 'Child Moving Inland'. That just won't do, Joyce. I'm sorry."

"It won't do?" Joyce was numb with disappointment.

It's a good poem, she thought. I know it is. She had known that while she was writing it from the way the words flowed easily through her mind, singing their way through her pen onto the paper, saying simply and perfectly what she wanted them to say. When it was completed, she had read it over with a deep feeling of satisfaction. And again before delivering the poems to the *Archive* office she had read it and been pleased. It was with a sense of pleased expectation that she had come again to the office this afternoon to get Ginny's reaction.

"That's the one I wrote," she said now, wondering if perhaps Ginny had gotten the poems mixed up in her mind.

"I know it is," Ginny said awkwardly, "and I'm sorry. I honestly am. But you can see for yourself that it just doesn't fit in with the other things in the *Archive*. It's not the same style of writing."

"Well, maybe it isn't," Joyce admitted, "but is that necessary? I mean, does everything we print have to sound just the same?"

"We're the South's oldest college literary magazine," Ginny said stiffly. "We have a fine reputation and we want to live up to it. We don't want to start publishing nursery-school jingles."

"There's nothing nursery-schoolish about that poem," Joyce exclaimed. "Just because you can read it and understand it without having to have it explained to you . . ."

"Hey, now, what's the trouble here?" Bill Johnson swung in between the girls, bringing his chair to an abrupt halt beside the desk. "Are you two at it again already?"

"We're not 'at it again,' " Ginny said briskly. "We're just having a little discussion about Joyce's poetry selections. She doesn't understand yet about our editorial policies, and it's unfortunate that the poem that's up for discussion happens to be one she wrote herself, which makes it a little touchy to . . ."

"One she wrote herself?" Bill turned to Joyce. "Did you write us one, Joyce? I'd like very much to read it."

"It's right there on the desk," Joyce said hesitantly. Suddenly she was not sure whether she wanted Bill to read the poem or not. A few moments ago she had been so delighted with it, so proud of herself for producing it, but now after Ginny's negative reaction . . . "Maybe

Ginny's right after all," she said, reaching for the offending sheet of paper. "Maybe it is too childishly simple."

But Bill was too quick for her. His fingers slipped in ahead of hers and plucked the paper from the desk. He read it slowly and then, with the paper still in his hand, he raised his eyes to meet Ginny's.

"I like it."

"Do you, Bill?" Joyce was delighted. "Do you really?" She tried not to sound too triumphant as she turned to Ginny. "Then you'll use it?"

"We will not use it," Ginny said sharply. "I'm editor-in-chief here, not Bill Johnson. And you, Bill," she turned angrily to the boy, "can't you leave my editorial decisions alone? Are you just trying to stir up trouble?"

"Editorial decisions! Oh, come off it, Ginny, you're not the end-all to everything." Bill was beginning to look angry himself. "Besides, all I said was that I like the poem. How is that stirring up trouble? I do like it. It's a way I've often felt myself after a summer at the shore." He glanced down at the paper and read the final verse aloud:

It's only since we have come away
That we find her listening for the sea.
I think she never had guessed before
How strangely silent a night could be.

"I like that. I know just how the girl feels, and I think our readers would too."

"That's not poetry," Ginny retorted, "that's verse. You don't have to go any deeper than the surface of your mind to understand . . ."

"But some people like that kind of poetry," Bill interrupted. "Some people like to read poetry for enjoyment, not to spend an hour searching out hidden meanings. I'm not saying there's anything wrong with the other kind of poetry, Ginny, the kind you like, but I do think you're going overboard on it. A campus magazine should be for the whole campus, not just for the intellectuals. We should try to put in something for everybody."

"That's right!" Joyce broke in eagerly, delighted to hear her own views expressed so clearly. "I'm sure the magazine would be a lot more popular if it weren't *all* so highbrow! Why don't we put in a love story sometime, or a mystery story, or a crossword puzzle?"

"A crossword puzzle!" Ginny looked horrified. "Next you'll be wanting a joke page! This is the South's oldest college literary magazine . . ."

"Seems to me I've heard you mention that before," Bill muttered.

" . . . and," Ginny continued, pointedly ignoring him, "I am *not* going to lower its standards. We're going to stay a literary magazine as long as I'm editor-in-chief."

There was a moment's silence after she finished speaking. Suddenly Joyce realized that the silence extended past the three of them and took in the entire room. The girls with the typewriter and the rulers, the boy at the drawing board, all had stopped work and were following the conversation in the front of the room.

Then, as suddenly as it had stopped, the bustle of activity began again. The typewriter took up its monotonous clicking, the boy turned back to his drawing, the girls with rulers hurriedly started measuring their pages.

"Then you're not going to use the poem?" Joyce asked without much hope.

"No," Ginny said. "I don't like to hurt your feelings, but we can't use the poem."

Joyce gave Bill a last pleading look, but he made no further attempt to support her.

"Can't fight it, Joyce," he said. "She's boss."

"But the space;" Joyce said, "we can't have more than twelve lines."

"There was a Bryan Parkley thing in that bunch. Wasn't that about the right length?"

"Yes," Joyce admitted, "but oh, Ginny, you can't mean to use that!"

"Bryan's a wonderful poet," Ginny said. "He's one of our regular contributors. Do you have the poem with you?"

"No," Joyce said, "it's back in my room with the other discards."

"Well, go back and find it before something happens to it and get it back here as soon as you can."

Later, as she shuffled through the papers on her desk in search of the Parkley poem, Joyce expressed her disgust to Stella.

"That awful, meaningless thing that you and I thought was crazy—she actually means to use it!"

Stella was, as usual, engrossed in a book. Now she looked up in surprise. "Aren't you supposed to be poetry editor? Don't *you* say what poems are used?"

"Oh, sure," Joyce said with a touch of bitterness in her voice. "I make the poetry selections, just as long as I select exactly the things Ginny wants. For all the authority I have, I might as well not be there at all."

"Well, drop it then," Stella suggested, "if you feel that way about it."

Joyce shook her head. "I don't want to do that. I like working on a magazine and I like the Johnson boy. And maybe eventually Ginny will come around a little and take a chance using something different."

"From what you say of Ginny," Stella replied crisply, "I would doubt it. But then, I guess you can never tell." She shrugged her shoulders and turned back to her book.

When she finally located the poem, Joyce crammed it unceremoniously into an envelope, wrote Ginny Boylston's name on the front, and carried it down the hall to Peggy Bennett's room. The door was standing open, and Peggy stood in front of the mirror. Her roommate Trish Nelson sprawled across her bed, hemming a skirt. Peggy gave her lipstick a quick blot and turned with a welcoming smile as Joyce entered.

"Hi, Joyce! Did you stop by to chat? Wish you'd come a few minutes sooner; I'm *en route* to English class."

"I know," Joyce said. "I wanted to catch you before you left. I have an envelope here for Ginny Boylston, and I wondered if you'd drop it off at the *Archive* office on your way to class."

"Sure," Peggy said, "Glad to." She reached out her hand for the envelope. "I should charge you for special delivery service, but I won't. See you later, gals."

"See you later," Joyce echoed, "and thanks!"

She turned to follow the red-haired girl from the room when Trish pulled herself to a sitting position on the bed.

"Wait a minute, will you, Joyce? I want to talk to you."

Joyce felt a prickling of apprehension.

"I can't stay very long; I've got some studying to do."

"It will just take a minute." Trish paused, and Joyce knew with a cold certainty what was to follow. An instant later she heard the words she had been dreading. "About last night, that crashing noise. Do you know what it was?"

Joyce hesitated. "Do you?"

"Yes," Trish said, "I found out when I went downstairs. Someone had been trying to break into the parlor. The screen had been pulled off the hinges and thrown clear out onto the ground, and there were scuff marks on the window sill."

"Oh?" Joyce tried to look surprised. "It's funny I haven't heard anyone talking about it today."

"No one knows," Trish said. "The housemother was there when I got there, and she called the campus policeman. They decided to keep the whole thing quiet for now. They were afraid the girls would get panicky if they knew somebody had been trying to break in."

"Do they have any idea who it was?" Joyce asked nervously.

"No. They checked the halls right away but didn't find anyone. They think perhaps it was a thief, someone who planned to go through the rooms looking for jewelry. Or one of the fellows from the boys' campus trying to play a practical joke. Since there was no one in the halls, whoever it was must have got scared when the screen came crashing off and beat it off campus as fast as he could." She paused. "That's what they think."

Joyce forced herself to meet Trish's blue eyes. They were not accusing, merely questioning.

"And what do *you* think?" Joyce asked.

"I'm not sure," Trish said slowly. "I didn't tell them about meeting you and Betty on the stairs. I—I wanted to ask you about it first."

"Betty told you," Joyce said stiffly, "that we went down to investigate the noise just as you did."

"But how could you?" Trish asked. "The parlor is right under my room, and I was up as soon as the screen fell. You couldn't have got down the stairs and back up again in time to meet me coming down. It just wouldn't have been possible!"

"Maybe you lost track of time," Joyce suggested uncomfortably. "You could have been conscious of the noise while you were sleeping and then waked up and thought you had just heard it."

It sounded feeble even to her own ears.

Trish regarded her closely. "Why did you come back so quickly? You never even stayed downstairs long enough to check and see what the noise was. Surely if you were interested enough to go down in the first place . . ."

Joyce dropped her eyes uneasily from the honest blue ones.

"Once we got down there we felt scared. We—we didn't know what we might find. We thought . . ."

She raised her eyes again and saw that Trish did not believe her.

For an instant Joyce was tempted to tell her the truth, the entire truth, exactly as it had happened. She liked and trusted this big steady girl with the blunt ways and deep voice. It would be so easy to tell her. All she would have to say would be, "Betty got herself locked out and I went down to let her in." Just those few words and things would be cleared up and the matter would be forgotten.

But she couldn't break her promise to Betty. "I won't tell anybody," she had told her, "I won't tell, I promise."

I'll talk to Betty, she thought now. I'll get her to come tell Trish herself. Surely she'll release me from the promise when she sees the position I'm in.

And since there was nothing more she could say, she turned toward the door.

"I've got to get some studying done. I'll see you later."

"All right," Trish said, "go on and study." There was a coolness in her voice that Joyce had never heard there before.

But Betty was not in her room when Joyce stopped by, so she was unable to talk to her immediately. Her conversation with Trish hung upon her like a dead weight. The coolness in the girl's voice, the disbelief in the usually friendly blue eyes had cut deeply. Joyce hated to wait any longer than necessary to get things straightened out.

Once in her room she tossed herself across her bed and picked up her biology notes which were piled in a jumble on the bedside table. She tried to focus her attention upon them, but after a few moments she sighed and tossed them to the foot of the bed and reached for her history book instead.

"I need a break," she rationalized to herself. "I'll get back to biology in a few minutes."

History was a favorite subject of Joyce's and she had

had an excellent professor for the course the year before. Now, with a breath of relief, she pushed the dry biology course to the back of her mind and let herself be drawn into the battles of history. She meant only to read her next assignment and get back to biology again, but when she reached the end of the assigned chapters the new American Literature book beckoned from its place in the bookcase. Joyce picked it up, meaning only to leaf through it for a few minutes, but soon she stumbled upon one of her favorite authors and let herself be drawn into his story. She was still reading when Stella tossed aside her own book and said, "Let's go get some dinner."

Betty was in the cafeteria. When she saw Joyce, she waved and motioned to some empty places beside her, but seated at the crowded cafeteria table, Joyce found no privacy in which to bring up the subject of the midnight adventure.

Oh, well, she consoled herself, I'll talk to her on the way back to the dormitory.

But a moment later Betty glanced at her watch, let out a little squeal, and leaped to her feet.

"My goodness, I'd better hurry! Tim is to pick me up in seven minutes and I'm not even dressed yet!"

"Are you dating him on a week night?" Lyn Friche asked in surprise. "Where on earth can you go and get back by ten?"

"Oh, we'll just ride around I guess." Betty hurriedly pushed her dessert aside and snatched up her pocketbook. "Anybody who wants my pie is welcome to it. See you later!"

And she was gone, flying like a dark-haired little whirl-wind through the crowded cafeteria and disappearing out the front door.

With a sigh of frustration Joyce finished her own dinner at a more leisurely pace and rose to leave with the other girls.

The evening was cool as they walked across the campus to the dormitory. The warm, lazy, end-of-the-summer weather was beginning to give way to the crispness of autumn. The maples which lined the campus walks were heavy and dark against the twilight sky. Gazing up at them, Joyce knew that it would be only a few weeks more before autumn touched their leaves with color, painting the whole campus in flame.

It's an odd time, Joyce thought, this moment when you're finished with one season and not yet started on another. You're ready for something, and it's not there, and you don't quite know what to do about it.

They were passing the music building. From somewhere in its depths came the sound of a piano. Whoever was playing was playing badly, just a series of notes over and over, but the sound of the piano through the emptiness of the not-quite-autumn evening brought with it a wave of memories.

Last year there was a boy, Joyce thought, who played a piano, and I thought he was wonderful. I thought I was in love with him. All the while Jeff was there and I never looked at him, just at the boy at the piano. It's funny the way things happen, and how it takes just a little thing, a voice or a scent or the sound of a piano, to bring something back again.

Abruptly the music stopped, and Joyce realized that Lyn was speaking to her.

"Anything the matter, Joyce? You're so quiet tonight."

"No," Joyce said, "nothing's the matter. Just in a quiet mood, I guess."

This evidently satisfied Lyn, for she turned back to conversation with the others, leaving Joyce to finish the walk in silence.

When they approached the dormitory, a long-legged figure swung into sight, and as he drew nearer Joyce caught her breath. In that one instant of recognition, the lonely nostalgia disappeared and she knew with a quiet certainty just why she had been lonely and for whom.

It was as though, she told herself later, there was an emptiness inside me, a waiting for somebody, and then suddenly he was there and the emptiness was gone.

She did not let herself quicken her pace as they approached each other. She kept herself from speaking until Stella too recognized the figure and called out, "Jeff! Hello! Haven't seen you since we got back to Denton!"

"Hi, girls!" Jeff MacGreggor's voice was casual as he turned and fell into step beside them. "I haven't had a chance to see *anybody;* med school keeps me so darned busy. I'm on my way to the library now to do about three hours of research."

He was trying to sound unconcerned, but there was no hiding the note of pride that crept into his voice when he said the words "med school." Stella caught it too and laughed at him with the teasing affection of an old friend.

"Poor old Jeff, so overworked! But you love it, every minute of it, don't you?"

"Yes," Jeff admitted sheepishly, "I guess I do. Even old Morton, my skeleton."

For an instant Joyce found herself sharply resentful of Stella and the easy give-and-take between Jeff and her. She put her hand up possessively and touched Jeff's arm.

"I'll walk over to the library with you, Jeff. I've got some studying to do there myself."

"Oh? Well, swell . . ." Jeff started to answer when Peggy Bennett broke in.

"You can't go tonight, Joyce! There's a dormitory meeting at seven, and we're electing officers. Your name is up for sophomore representative."

Joyce tried to keep the irritation out of her voice when she answered. "That's right. I'd forgotten all about it."

They had reached the dormitory by this time. As the other girls turned to go in, Joyce hesitated.

"It's only six-thirty. I could walk as far as the corner with you anyway."

Jeff said, "I'd like that."

The darkness was settling quickly and what had been twilight a moment ago was rapidly becoming dusk. They walked a few moments in silence and then almost as though by accident Joyce felt Jeff's hand brush against hers and an instant later close around it. It was a moment more before he spoke.

"I've been meaning to call you about going out somewhere, Joyce, but I *have* been really busy. I used to think I was kept on the go in undergraduate school, but boy, it was nothing compared to this! I've hardly had a moment to breathe since school started. But, like Stella says, I—I guess I wouldn't have it any other way really."

Joyce felt a sudden stab of jealousy. Maybe he was being worked hard, but he could at least resent it a little. The way he spoke, it actually sounded as though he preferred his work to seeing her.

"That's all right," she said coolly. "I've been pretty busy myself. I hadn't really thought about your calling."

Jeff was silent. When he spoke again there was a little catch in his voice.

"Hadn't you really, Joyce? I have. There have been a couple of times when I started to, and then I'd think of all the stuff I had to do, and I'd know I couldn't suggest going anywhere, and I felt like such a dope phoning just because I wanted to hear you say hello."

Joyce felt her defenses crumbling against the sincerity in his voice.

"I didn't mean that, Jeff—about not thinking about you." Her voice was very low. "I think about you a lot. More—more than I ought to."

"Do you, Joyce?" Abruptly he stopped walking and swung her toward him, leaning over a little to look down into her face. "Do you mean that?"

"Yes," Joyce said, "I mean it."

Her voice, even to her own ears, sounded thin and shaky. It had grown too dark to see Jeff's face clearly, but she was terribly conscious of how tall he was standing over her.

"Look," he said, "how about going to the Homecoming with me, to the game and to the dance afterwards? I hadn't planned on going, but I can throw over the studies for one day without falling too much behind. Remember the dance last year?"

"Yes," Joyce whispered, "I remember."

It had been a magic night, a fairyland of paper lanterns and golden streamers and dreamlike music, and Jeff had been with her, tall and handsome in his tuxedo, and he had brought her gardenias. But it had been wrong. She had made it wrong, because Jeff had not been Jeff to her then, only an escort to take her someplace because another boy had not asked her.

But this time—this time there was no other boy, and to go with Jeff to the Homecoming Dance . . .

"Oh," she breathed, "I'd love to! I'd love to go to the Homecoming!"

For an instant they stood there straining to see each other's faces through the shadows, and then suddenly Jeff reached over and pulled her against him and bent his face down to hers. It was so easy, so natural, as though he had kissed her a hundred times before. Joyce was conscious of the rustle of the maples above them and the sound of voices in the distance and the beating of her heart. And then only of Jeff.

It was only later back in her room at the dormitory that Betty's words sprang into her mind.

"You were smart last year, the way you handled Jeff . . . he never got too sure of you . . . that's why you have him still interested today."

You were smart last year . . .

But last year I didn't care, Joyce thought. And now I do; I care terribly. And Jeff knows. He couldn't help but know after tonight.

She shut her eyes, and the moment came back to her, the whisper of the maples and Jeff's arms around her, and she herself raising her face eagerly for his kiss.

If Betty is right, she thought now, and Jeff's interest in me has been because he wasn't sure of me . . . But no, she's wrong. She has to be wrong.

She lay awake thinking for a long time before she finally fell asleep.

5

End of a Romance

Autumn came quickly that year in a rush of brown and gold and orange, starting with the maples and spreading across the campus in all directions as far as one could see. Joyce had anticipated it, but this did not dull her surprise. She went to bed one night in a drab green world and awoke the next morning to find the window streaked with frost and summer officially over.

"For heaven's sake, Joyce," Stella said in amusement, "it happens every year, you know! You don't have to fall out the window looking at things!"

"It doesn't happen every year to *me,*" Joyce reminded her roommate. "In Florida we don't have any autumn; at least, not like this!"

"That's right," Stella said, "I hadn't thought about that before. The trees never change down there, do they?" She smiled, an odd, wistful, little smile which was out of character for Stella. "It makes it seem more remote than ever. I guess Florida has always seemed like a foreign country to me, exotic and romantic and unreachable. I still find it hard to imagine your actually living there."

"Well, it *is* a pretty far country," Joyce agreed, "when you're from Chicago. But maybe someday you can come visit me."

She said it casually, in an off-handed way, without giving much thought to the words she spoke. She was hardly prepared for the other girl's reaction.

"Oh, Joyce, wouldn't that be wonderful! And I suppose it *could* happen someday."

Her eyes were shining with an enthusiasm Joyce had seldom seen there before.

"Of course, it could happen," Joyce said quickly. "We'll *make* it happen!"

But privately she tried to imagine Stella visiting in her home, fitting in with Frank and Margo and the rest of the easy-going gang that had been her crowd since high school, relaxing and tossing banter back and forth with her brother Randall, and it was hard. It was more than hard; it was almost impossible. Stella, in her mind, was part of college, a serious, dark-haired girl never seen without a book in her hand and an intent expression on her face. Not part of the easy, relaxed life of home.

"You'll come for a long visit sometime," Joyce repeated, "you'll see." But privately she doubted very much that Stella would ever actually come, or that it would be a successful visit if she did.

Joyce's relationship with Trish Nelson was still strained and chilly. She had seen Trish several times since their conversation in her room, but they had never really talked together. There was an atmosphere of strain between them, and though they were outwardly friendly with each other, it was a forced friendliness.

It's not what happened itself, Joyce thought unhappily; it's that she knows I lied to her about it. If only I could take her aside and explain the whole situation to her and clear it up.

But when she finally succeeded in getting Betty alone and asking permission, she was bewildered by the girl's passionate response.

"No, Joyce, no! You promised! You gave me your word that you wouldn't tell anybody!"

"I know I did," Joyce admitted. "That's why I'm asking you to release me from the promise. I have to tell Trish, Betty—just Trish, nobody else. She already knows we were involved in it somehow; all I want to do is to tell her exactly what happened."

"No," Betty insisted, "not Trish or anybody!" There was a note of hysteria in her voice. "If you tell Trish, she'll tell Peggy, and Peggy will mention it to Lyn, and Lyn to somebody else, and first thing we know it'll get to the dean, and I'll be confined to campus, and that would be the end between Tim and me! And, oh, Joyce, I just couldn't bear that!"

"That's ridiculous," Joyce said unsympathetically. "To begin with, Trish wouldn't tell Peggy if I asked her not to; she's not that kind of girl. And in the second place, if you *should* be confined to campus for a while, it wouldn't be the end of the world. Tim could still come over here to see you. Why would it break you up?"

"Tim would never be content just to sit in the parlor and talk," Betty said miserably. "He likes to be on the go all the time and have fun! And he wants a girl who will go along with him."

"How could he feel that way," Joyce asked impatiently, "when he's the one responsible for your being locked out in the first place? He kept you out past curfew; it was his fault as much as yours. I'd think he could stand visiting you on campus for a little while instead of gadding around."

"But he couldn't," Betty insisted. "Not Tim. He likes a good time too much. That's just the way he is, Joyce, and I guess it's one of the reasons why he's so fascinating." She paused, and suddenly her face brightened as a new idea occurred to her. "Tim has a wonderful plan for next Saturday night. He's taking me out to dinner, and then we're going to ride over to Raleigh to the Circus Room, that brand new night club that's just opening there! They're supposed to have a marvelous Latin American orchestra, and a fabulous floor show with Carlos Méndez, the singer, and sword dancers and everything! Why don't you and Jeff double with us, and we'll have a whirl!"

"Carlos Méndez?" Joyce was impressed. "I've seen him on television, and he *is* good. But all the way to Raleigh . . ."

"It's not so far," Betty said easily, "and we can get out-of-town permission—I know we can. We have late curfew on Saturday nights."

Joyce hesitated. "It does sound like fun . . ."

It was more than a week since the night Jeff had kissed her. He had called her once since then, but it had been a hurried phone call because he said there were other boys waiting in line to use the phone. Just "Hi, how are you doing?" —with no mention of going out anywhere. She had half expected him to take her some place that week-end, even if it were just to a movie, but the invitation never came. He had dropped by the dormitory Saturday afternoon; she found his note tacked to the office bulletin board, but she had walked over to the Dope Shop to have a coke with some of the girls and had missed him. He had evidently not tried to stop by again.

Now the next week-end loomed on the horizon, drab and empty, and Betty's suggestion was a tempting one.

"We could all go together in Tim's Porsche," she was saying now, her pixie face bright with enthusiasm. "It would be kind of crowded, but fun! And it would give us a chance to get all dressed up."

"My new black dance dress," Joyce murmured thoughtfully, "I got it for my birthday last summer, and I've never had a chance to wear it!"

She visualized the expression on Jeff's face when he saw her in the new black dress. It was the first dressy black frock she had ever owned, and the first time she had seen herself in it, in the Montgomery Roberts fitting room mirror, she had been stunned at what it did for her.

The black accentuated all her good features—it made her hair paler and shinier, her gray eyes darker, her cheekbones higher and more pronounced.

"I have to have it," she had told her mother later. "Mother, I just have to! There's never been a dress like this one before!"

"How much was the price?" Mrs. Reynolds had asked thoughtfully, and hesitantly Joyce had told her.

"But," she had added, "if I can have the dress I won't want another thing for my birthday, not another thing—not even a party!"

And, on her birthday morning, the dress had been there hanging on the closet door when she woke up.

Now, thinking about it, she saw herself in the dress, her head thrown back, laughing up at Jeff who was gazing adoringly down at her. And in the background the sophisticated atmosphere of the night club, with Carlos Méndez singing, and the orchestra pounding out a seething Latin American rhythm.

Well, perhaps that was exaggerating things a little, but it *could* be a wonderful evening, the kind you dreamed about afterward. And they hadn't had one date yet, not one single date this year! Surely it was about time they had one exciting evening.

"All right," she said suddenly, "I'll do it. I'll phone Jeff right away."

Jeff, when she got him on the phone, sounded pleasantly surprised at her call.

"I was about to call you," he said. "I thought we might go out to dinner Saturday."

"Really!" Joyce felt a happy little thrill. It was so much nicer to have Jeff suggest a date than to be the one to instigate it herself. "Why, that's fine! And Betty and Tim want us to double with them!"

"Suits me," Jeff said agreeably. "Where do you want to go?"

"Oh, any place," Joyce said. "For dinner, that is. And we can go over to the Circus Room afterwards."

"The Circus Room? You mean, that new night club that's just opened over in Raleigh? That's a pretty long way to go."

"Oh, it's not *that* far," Joyce said lightly. "And Betty says they have a wonderful floor show. Besides, Tim is going to take us over in his car, so it will be like having our own private chauffeur."

"Tim?" Jeff's voice had an odd note in it. "You mean Tim Conway? Is he the Tim we're to double with?"

"Yes," Joyce told him. "He and Betty are going steady."

"Well, we're not going any place in *his* car," Jeff said decidedly. "I've seen that guy tearing into the parking lot in the morning. He drives like a maniac. We'll go to dinner in my car, and I'll do the driving. And I'm not too keen on this night club idea. I'd thought we could make an early evening of it and get back in time to do some studying."

"Oh, Jeff," Joyce said, trying to keep the irritation out of her voice, "it's Saturday night! Can't you study all afternoon and then all day Sunday?"

"I don't know," Jeff said slowly. "I'll see. I—look, Joyce, I want to give you a good time. You know that. I just have so darned much to do, and I don't want to get behind, especially right in the beginning like this. I—I feel so sort of pushed."

"Well, we'll see how things are Saturday night," Joyce said easily. "We'll decide then."

"Okay," Jeff said, "but don't count on it. I mean that, Joyce; don't count on it. I don't want you to be disappointed."

"Don't worry," Betty said later, when Joyce told her about the conversation. "He'll come around. Once we're all out some place to dinner together, Jeff won't be such a stick-in-the-mud. Tim will get him enthused about going on. Tim can get anybody enthused about anything!"

It wasn't until later, back in her own room, that Joyce realized that somewhere along the line she had completely forgotten her purpose of getting Betty to agree to talk to Trish.

The rest of the week passed slowly. When Saturday evening finally arrived, Joyce was dressed and ready to go long before the loud speaker boomed forth its message of "204—JOYCE REYNOLDS—204—JOYCE REYNOLDS—CALLER!"

"How do I look?" she asked Stella, giving herself a last hurried examination in the mirror. The black dress was as perfect as she remembered it. It made her hair a light halo around her head and her eyes dark and smoky, and at Betty's coaxing she had added the faintest touch of rouge to her cheeks to give her color. The result, Joyce thought with satisfaction, was good. Very good indeed.

Stella, catching the look on her face, burst out laughing.

"Joyce Reynolds, you don't have to ask me how you look! You look stunning, and you know it! But for goodness' sakes, stop looking so smug about it—you look like the cat who swallowed the canary!"

Joyce laughed with her. "You're right, I do feel pretty self-satisfied! Oh, Stell, it's going to be such a heavenly evening! I can just feel it!"

The magic stayed with her as she ran down the steps and into the parlor.

Tim and Betty were already there seated together on one of the sofas, and Jeff was leaning across the back of the sofa, talking to them. He straightened up when Joyce entered, and as he turned to greet her she saw on his face the look that she had hoped would be there.

"Hi, Joyce!" he said, half shyly. "You—you look great!"

It was the first time she had seen Jeff shy. Usually he was so strong, so completely sure of himself, but now . . .

He's thinking about the last time we were together, Joyce realized with a feeling of happiness. When he kissed me. She felt suddenly very close to him.

She smiled at him and said, "Hi, Jeff! You look pretty handsome yourself!"

"And this is Tim." Betty's voice was a happy little chirp at her elbow. "Joyce, Tim Conway—Tim, Joyce Reynolds, my very best friend!"

"Hello, Joyce!" Tim was grinning at her with an easy happy-go-lucky look that had a charm all its own. "Always glad to meet a friend of Betty's, and especially such a pretty one!"

Looking at him, Joyce saw what it was that had so completely captivated Betty, because she was almost captivated herself.

Tim Conway was lean and broad-shouldered, with hair that was curling forward over his forehead, even though he had evidently tried to slick it back, and a winning, boyish way about him that made you smile without quite knowing what you were smiling about. He was not as tall as Jeff, but the compactness of his build made Jeff seem awkward in his long-legged ranginess. Beside him, Jeff seemed older and more serious and perhaps a bit dull.

What a horrible thing to think, Joyce told herself in horror! Why, Jeff is more fun than anybody I know!

She turned quickly back to Jeff and caught his hand. "Where are we going to eat?"

"Well, what about the Carriage House?" Jeff suggested. He turned to Tim, "Unless you have other ideas . . ."

"Any place is fine with me," Tim said agreeably, throwing a casual, possessive arm around Betty's shoulders. "Food is food, wherever you eat it. What I'm looking forward to is the second part of the evening!"

"So am I!" Betty echoed, beaming up at Tim. "It's going to be fabulous—but fabulous!"

Joyce glanced at Jeff to see his reaction to this, but he had already turned and was leading the way out the door and into the parking lot.

Once outside, however, he broke the news swiftly.

"We'd better take two cars," he said, as Tim motioned them toward his Porsche, "because Joyce and I are going to have to get back early. Maybe we can make it to the Circus Room another time."

"Early?" Tim exclaimed in astonishment. "For the love of Pete, MacGreggor, it's Saturday night! Let's live a little!"

"Sorry," Jeff said shortly, in a tone that left no room for argument, "just can't manage it tonight. We'll meet you at the Carriage House."

He opened the door to his own car and motioned Joyce in, shutting it carefully behind her.

"I'm sorry, Joyce," he said more gently, as soon as he too was in the car and starting the engine. "I know you'd like to go gadding tonight, but I just plain can't. I tried to get as much studying done as I could this afternoon, but I got bogged down in some stuff I couldn't understand. Dr. Rathbone is going to let me come over to his home tomorrow morning and go over it with him, and I've got to read my notes over and try to get as much as possible out of it tonight."

"Couldn't you tell Dr. Rathbone that you would be over tomorrow *afternoon?"* Joyce asked. "Then you could spend the morning studying."

"If a professor offers to use part of his own Sunday to give you some extra tutoring," Jeff said, "you don't dictate to him exactly what time of day you'd like him to do it."

"You don't have to 'dictate,'" Joyce said. "You could just ask him. It probably doesn't make any difference to Dr. Rathbone whether you come in the morning or afternoon. And besides, how much studying do you actually think you'll get done tonight if you do get back to the dorm early?"

"A lot," Jeff said shortly. He turned the car out of the parking lot onto the highway. They drove in silence the rest of the way to the Carriage House.

Dinner, as far as Joyce was concerned, was a thoroughly wretched meal. She picked at her food, hardly tasting the chicken the waiter placed before her, or the green salad or the crisp hot bread. She was angry at Jeff, but at the same time, deep within her, there was a cold little fear that had nothing to do with anger.

Jeff had turned her down, refusing to do the one thing she had ever asked of him. She wanted to go to the Circus Room, she wanted to terribly, and Jeff knew it. If he really cared about her, he could have managed somehow to take her there. People could always manage to work things out if they wanted to enough.

But Jeff hadn't.

Betty's words kept coming back to her, catching at the edge of her mind, nagging little words, worrying as a mosquito. "You were smart last year—he never got too sure of you . . . that's why you have him still interested . . ."

Strange how those words had stuck with her, hanging there, ready to pop into her mind at any moment. She heard her own voice that night out under the maples. "I think about you a lot. More—more than I ought to."

She had handed herself to him with those words. There was no mistaking their meaning. "Here I am, Jeff —your girl if you want me—nobody else's, just yours." Jeff had understood. He could not have helped but understand. And now—now he was sure of her. He did not need to worry about her any more, to be jealous of her, to wear himself out trying to please her.

He takes me for granted, Joyce thought miserably. Already, he takes me for granted. And I did it myself. I have no one to blame but myself.

The others were talking. With the surface of her mind, Joyce followed the conversation. Tim was on the subject of sports cars. He was telling them about his Porsche and the work he had done on it, the speed it could make, the races he had been in. Betty, her eyes shining, broke in every once in a while with some expression of agreement or enthusiasm. They looked so young, the two of them, so gay and perfect together. Jeff was not talking a lot, but he was commenting every once in a while, making a few remarks to show that he was listening. He did not seem very interested.

Once or twice he addressed some comment to Joyce, as though trying to draw her into the conversation, but she ignored them or answered with a brisk "yes" or "no" and spent the rest of the time concentrating on her plate in stony silence.

They had almost finished the meal when Tim brought up the subject of the Circus Room.

"How about it, Jeff old man? Change your mind about coming with us?"

Joyce held her breath and raised her eyes to Jeff's waiting for his answer.

Jeff met her eyes and their gaze held a moment. He hesitated.

"Come on," Tim pushed his chair back from the table. "Let's give the girls a thrill. And after we go there, there's another great spot I know of where they have the hottest trumpet this side of New Orleans."

"Hold on a minute," Jeff was frowning. "It's already nine o'clock. How do you think you're going to make it to Raleigh, an hour's drive away, and hit two night clubs and make it back to get the girls into their dorm by midnight."

"Oh, we'll make it," Tim threw Joyce his charming, boyish grin. "Who says it's an hour's drive? Not in my car, it's not. Besides we don't have to stay long in either place. You game, Joyce?"

"I'm game," Joyce said decidedly. The time element was something she had not thought about before, and it disturbed her, but she was too intent on forcing Jeff to take her to let it change her mind. "I'd like to go."

"Come on, Jeff," Betty said pleadingly, bending forward across the table. Her little gypsy face was bright with excitement. "We'll have a whirl! Please, you and Joyce come with us!"

Jeff shook his head. "Sorry. Maybe another time."

He got up and put his hands on the back of Joyce's chair. "Ready, Joyce? And thanks for eating with us, Betty—Tim. We'll get together again sometime."

At the doorway he paused and let Joyce walk in front of him. She passed him in silence, and in silence stalked out to the car.

They did not talk as they drove back to the dormitory and pulled into the parking lot. When they stopped, Joyce opened her door quickly, without waiting for Jeff to come around and open it for her, and started to slide out of the car.

"Joyce!" Jeff reached over and caught her hand. "Honey, look . . ."

It was the first time he had called her "honey." The endearment hung in the air between them, a warm little word, oddly out of place in the strained atmosphere. "Please, Joyce . . ."

"Please, what?" Joyce said coldly.

"Please listen to me a minute." Jeff's voice was gruff. "Joyce, I'm a med student. You know what that means; it means I'm going to be a doctor. At least, I *hope* to be a doctor. But to make it—to go all the way—it means I have to work, not just fool around the way you do in undergraduate school. A guy can gad around every week-end and still get his B.A., but when he crosses over into graduate school, it's another thing, Joyce, it's . . ." He stopped. "You're not even listening."

"Yes, I'm listening," Joyce said miserably.

She thought, that may be so. he may have to work hard. But if he wanted to take me places, really wanted to, he would find time somehow. If he felt he had to work a little bit to hang on to me—if he didn't take me so much for granted . . .

"I'll make it up to you," Jeff was saying now, "on Homecoming Week-end—the game, the dinner and the dance, the whole works. Regardless of how much work piles up, I'll say to heck with it for that week-end, I promise!"

He leaned closer, and Joyce thought, he's going to kiss me. And if he does, it will be like it was last time. I'll kiss him back and I won't be able to stay angry any longer. If I'm going to do anything, it will have to be now. Something, anything, to show him that I'm not somebody he can take for granted, that he can't wrap me around his little finger. I must do something. Let him be the one to do the chasing . . .

Jeff's breath was warm against her cheek.

"Joyce . . ."

With an effort, Joyce turned her face away. When she spoke, she made her voice cool and careless.

"The Homecoming Weekend? Don't worry about that, Jeff. I'm sure I can find somebody else who'd like to take me, somebody it won't be such an effort for. Then you can spend the whole time studying."

As soon as she said it, she knew it was the wrong thing to say. Even to her own ears the words were smug and sarcastic. What she had meant to be a cool tone came through as more than cool; it was icy and disdainful, and completely unpleasant.

For a long moment Jeff did not answer. When he finally did, it was not to plead or apologize. His voice matched her own.

"All right, Joyce, if that's the way you feel about it."

Joyce felt her heart sink within her. What have I done, she thought in horror. What in the world have I done!

She turned quickly. "Jeff, I'm sorry! I didn't mean—I was only trying . . ."

But Jeff had already swung open the car door and was getting out. He came around to her side of the car.

"You don't have to explain what you meant," he said quietly. "You made it pretty clear." He held the door politely. "Come on, I'll walk you up to the dormitory."

6

Life Without Jeff

The long weeks of autumn passed slowly. October moved through to its close and November began. Outside the color began to fade; leaves that had been brilliant turned brown and drooped and finally fell, making crisp piles along the walkways beneath the maples. The weather grew sharper, the radiators went on in the dormitories, and Saturday afternoons were crowded with the excitement of football games and after-game parties.

"Aren't you going to the game, Joyce?" Betty paused in the open doorway. "Tim's picking me up in a couple of minutes and you can ride over with us if you want to."

"Oh, I'll be along in a little while," Joyce said. "I've got a few things to do first. Besides, you and Tim will want a little time together before you have to join the other cheerleaders."

"Yes," Betty agreed seriously. "Of course, I'd give up being a cheerleader if Tim asked me to, but I think he likes me to do it. Tim likes girls who do things."

Betty's tiny figure was emphasized by the tight fitting top and short swirling skirt of her cheerleader outfit. Her dark hair shone and the color was high in her cheeks. Looking at her, Joyce thought that she should have been prettier than ever, but for some reason, she was not. There was a nervousness about her, a slight twitch to her face, and her gay smile came too quickly and too brightly. When she relaxed, her eyes looked tired.

Joyce had first noticed this the morning after their double date, when she had entered the cafeteria for breakfast. Betty was sitting at the end of a long table, a little apart from the others, drinking a cup of coffee. Her face was pale and tight looking, and there were dark circles under her eyes. She did not look like her usual self at all.

Joyce hesitated, wondering if she should carry her tray over and join her. It was the natural thing to do, to stop and say, "Hi, how was the Circus Room? Did you have fun? Tell me all about it!" But this morning Joyce did not want to hear about Betty's good time, not when her own memories of the previous evening were such unhappy ones. Betty would be sure to say, "We'll have to double again sometime, when Jeff is able to come with us," and she would have to reply, "There won't be any next time. Jeff and I aren't going together any longer."

And there it would be in words, out in the open, and somehow putting it that way, speaking it aloud to another person, would make it so much more definite. As it was, now she could tell herself, "It's not really that bad. Just a little spat; everybody has them. Jeff won't take it seriously; he'll change his mind."

He would not change his mind. Jeff was stubborn; once he made a decision, he stuck by it. Deep down inside, Joyce knew this, but she did not want to put it into words and talk about it to anybody. Turning her back on Betty, she unloaded her breakfast tray onto an empty table by the door and sat down to eat.

She was not alone long, however, for a few moments later Trish Nelson came over and sat down beside her. Joyce glanced up in surprise, for during the past weeks she had come to count this girl as a lost friend.

Without any preamble, Trish came immediately to the point.

"I know," she said in her straightforward way, "about Betty and the time you helped her get into the dormitory. I know the whole story now."

"You do?" Joyce was relieved. "I'm glad. I wanted to tell you, but Betty made me promise I wouldn't. It's much better, your knowing. How did you find out?"

"Betty told me." Trish smiled at the surprise on Joyce's face. "She had to. You see, I was the one who let her in last night."

"Last night! You mean it happened again, and this time it was you . . ."

Trish nodded. "I'm a light sleeper. It was your window she was throwing the pebbles at, but she missed and one plunked against mine, and it woke me up. I looked out and called down to her, and she must have been pretty desperate, because she asked me to come down and let her in."

"And you did it?"

Trish shrugged her shoulders helplessly. "What else could I do? I felt the same way you did. I didn't want to have any part of it, but what could I do—let her get expelled? I went down and opened one of the parlor windows. This time the screen held."

"It's funny," Joyce said, "I never heard the pebbles at all. I must have been sleeping soundly." Thinking back on the night before, she realized this had been the case. Jeff had left her at the door with a cool "Good night," and she had come upstairs and tossed herself across her bed and cried. It was funny crying, a way she had not cried since she was a very little girl and something precious to her had been lost, and she had realized with an aching sense of loneliness that it could probably never be found again. What had it been? She tried to remember. And then it came to her—a doll. It was that funny rag doll with the yarn hair, the one she had carried with her everywhere. They were taking a long trip someplace in the car, and Joyce had fallen asleep in the back seat with the doll beside her. And sometime while she slept, Randall, who had been just a baby at the time, had taken the doll and dropped it out the window.

"There's no sense going back," she remembered her father saying when she finally awoke. "It could be a hundred miles behind us by this time. We'll get you a new doll, honey, an even better one."

"But I don't want another doll!" Joyce had wailed. "I want *this* one!"

How many, many years ago that had been. Yet here she was, a sophomore in college, crying again in exactly the same way, with the same heavy, hopeless sense of loss.

"There are other boys, Joyce," she could tell herself. "You'll find another boy." And at the same time, deep within her was the same, inconsolable wail, "I don't want another boy! I want this one! Only one boy! Only Jeff!"

She had cried until she was exhausted, and when she fell asleep she had not wakened again, even when Stella returned from the library. She had not heard the pebbles against the window. It was lucky that Trish had.

"We didn't meet anybody in the hall," Trish was saying, her gruff voice low. "Thank goodness for that, because she made me promise not to tell, just as she did you. I'm worried about that girl, Joyce. She's not herself at all this year. It was three-thirty this morning when she crawled in that parlor window! Imagine staying out that late for any reason at all!"

"It's that Tim Conway," Joyce said. "He's influencing her to do it. Betty does everything he asks her to. And I can see his attraction; he's got a lot of charm, but he's sort of wild and devil-may-care and doesn't give a whoop about rules and regulations. And he expects Betty to be that way too."

Trish frowned. "I don't like it. Betty's always been mischievous and full of fun, but this is something else entirely. It's telling on her too. She tries to act cute and gay as she's always been, but underneath she's worn out. Look at her now."

Joyce followed Trish's gaze to where the small dark-haired girl had finished her coffee and was rising from the table. As she turned to leave, Betty glanced across the room and saw them and raised her hand in greeting, but her usual bright, cheery smile did not flash across her face. As Trish said, she looked worn out.

"I don't know what we can do about it," Joyce said. "I've tried talking to her, but she just gets mad at anything she thinks might be a criticism of Tim. If only Connie were here, she could handle things. She's always been able to pull Betty back down to earth."

"Yes," Trish agreed, "she needs Connie. But Connie's married now with her own life to lead, and Betty's got to learn to take care of herself."

Joyce was concerned about Betty's welfare and, in a way, she was glad to have something to think about to keep her mind off Jeff. She mentioned their quarrel to only two people, and one of these, Stella, had discovered it for herself.

Returning one evening from a summons to the telephone, she gave Joyce a penetrating look.

"You and Jeff have a blow-up?"

Joyce felt her face growing red.

"Why?" she asked hesitantly. "What makes you think that?"

"Because that was Jeff on the phone," Stella said. "He called to invite me to the Homecoming Dance."

"He invited *you* . . ." Joyce felt a sudden heaviness in the pit of her stomach. This was it then—the end of all her hoping. All along she had had that to cling to, the last final hope that one day the speaker would blare her name and it would be Jeff on the phone saying, "Look, let's let bygones be bygones; how about that date for the Homecoming?" But now that hope was gone. Jeff had invited Stella instead.

"That's—that's swell," she murmured, trying unsuccessfully to keep the misery out of her voice. "Jeff's a wonderful dancer. You—you should have a great time together."

"Oh, I'm not going," Stella said carelessly, "I told him I was busy."

"You're not going!" Joyce couldn't believe her ears. "But, Stell, this is the Homecoming Dance! You don't have a date for it; I know you don't . . ."

"I didn't tell him I had a date," Stella said crisply, "I just said I was busy. And I will be busy, studying or washing my hair or doing something." Her eyes met Joyce's and her expression softened. "I know how you feel about Jeff. You didn't really think I'd take advantage of any fuss you've had with him to snag a Homecoming date, did you?"

Joyce had an impulse to reach over and squeeze her hand, but Stella was not the kind of person who went in for hand-squeezing. It was hard to break through to Stella with any demonstration of affection.

So she merely said, "Thanks, Stell. Thanks a lot."

The knowledge that Jeff was not dating Stella did little to lift her unhappiness. After all, there were plenty of other girls in the world, and if Jeff intended to go to the

Homecoming Dance, it wouldn't be hard for him to find a date with somebody. When you came right down to it, it would probably have been better if that somebody were Stella, who was just an old friend, rather than an unknown who could turn out to be of more romantic interest.

She confided the situation to only one other person, and this, surprisingly, was Bill Johnson. Not that she had any intention of telling him when she sat in the *Archive* office one long Saturday afternoon, editing her pile of poetry. She liked Bill, but she did not feel she knew him well, certainly not well enough to burden him with a tale of broken romance.

Joyce was the only one in the office that afternoon. Everyone else was at the football game. Denton was playing Carolina State, which was a big game and one nobody seemed to want to miss. From where she sat by the window, she could see the parking lot outside the football field jammed with cars, and the shouts of the crowd drifted across to the English building.

Joyce felt no compulsion to walk across and enter the stadium. She had never really cared too much for football. The fun of attending a game had always been for her the companionship and excitement of doing something with a crowd, and today there was no one to go with. Trish, Peggy, and Lyn all had dates. Stella, who occasionally attended a game, had disappeared someplace —probably, Joyce thought, to the library. She could, of course, have gone with Betty and Tim; Betty had invited her, but she hated being the third person and going on another couple's date. It was far more pleasant to act as though she were going to the game and then cut back here to the *Archive* office and get this month's batch of poetry out of the way in peace and quiet.

If possible, the selection of poetry for this issue was worse than the last. As she read it, Joyce was torn between amusement and despair. She went through it slowly, selecting and setting aside two poems that she liked better than the others and two poems by Bryan Parkley which she could not understand but knew Ginny would want to use. She reread the others and then leaned back in her chair, shaking her head helplessly.

From the stadium there came a great roar. Somebody had scored. Joyce wondered idly which side it had been, but she didn't really care.

I guess I just don't have any school spirit, she thought miserably. If I did, I'd be there at the game, cheering along with the others, date or no date. But I don't want to go by myself. I want to go with Jeff! That would be the excitement of the game for me, to sit on the bleachers with Jeff beside me, both of us eating peanuts and yelling and being part of things together. Oh, Jeff!

She buried her face in her hands, pressing her eyelids tightly closed to keep back the tears.

I won't cry, she told herself. I just won't!

Another great cheer echoed from the football field.

The extra score after touchdown, Joyce thought. But still she did not lift her face from her hands.

The sound of the cheer had evidently drowned out the opening and closing of the office door, because she was completely unprepared an instant later when a voice at her elbow said, "What's the matter, kid? Those poems may be bad, but not *that* bad!"

"What . . ." Joyce was so startled that she dropped her hands from her face and whirled to face the voice without even thinking to wipe the tears from her cheeks. "Who—oh, Bill!" She let her breath out with a little gasp of relief. "I didn't hear you come in! You scared me to death!"

"Sorry, I didn't mean to." Bill Johnson was frankly curious. "What are you crying about? You didn't let all that business with Ginny get through to you, did you? She didn't mean anything personal against you. She's just got these set ideas about the *Archive*."

"I know," Joyce interrupted. "I was mad at first, but I'm over that now. I think it's a shame to print all that awful stuff, but if that's what she wants to do, I won't make any more fuss about it. It's her responsibility."

"Then what's the matter?" Bill asked. "A pretty girl doesn't sit weeping over a pile of poetry when everybody else is at a football game unless there's a reason—and a pretty good reason. What is it?"

"Why, I—I—" Joyce started to dodge the question, then suddenly changed her mind. Why not tell Bill, if he was interested? She wanted desperately to pour out the story to someone. Bill was a friend, even if not a close one. He would listen sympathetically, give her a little polite encouragement, and leave her feeling more cheerful. At least, Joyce assured herself, he couldn't say anything that would make her feel worse.

So taking a deep breath, she poured out the whole story—the way Jeff had behaved about dating, the reasons he had given for it, her own anger and frustration the night they doubled with Tim and Betty, the things she had said afterwards. Everything—except the kiss. The kiss she could not bring herself to talk about. That moment under the maples with the evening close around them and Jeff's arms drawing her to him—that was private and wonderful and all her own. Even if it should never happen again, it was her own to remember.

Bill did not answer at once when she finished speaking. He just sat there thoughtfully, as though mulling over what she had told him. When he did speak, it was not with the sympathy Joyce had expected.

"You've really messed things up pretty well, haven't you?" he said slowly.

At first Joyce was too surprised to answer. Then her surprise changed to anger.

"I messed things up! It wasn't just *me,* Bill. Jeff was partly responsible! He didn't have to act so darned superior about studying and not going out anywhere! He didn't have to take offense so fast just because I got mad! He didn't have . . ."

"No," Bill interrupted in seeming agreement, "he didn't. I guess you're right. Jeff's an unreasonable drudge. Why worry about breaking up with a guy like that? You'll have a better time without him."

"He is not a drudge!" Joyce exclaimed quickly. "And he's not unreasonable! He's—he's—absolutely perfect!" She felt the hot tears returning to her eyes. "You were right the first time, Bill. I was the one who messed things up—nobody else—just snippy little Joyce Reynolds." Her voice broke. "What—what can I do about it?"

"Not much, I'm afraid," Bill said. "Not if he's as angry as I would have been in the same circumstances. You've already tried to apologize, and if he hasn't got in touch with you by now, you might as well chalk it up to experience and get along without him. Next time you'll know enough to hang on to a guy if you want him."

"Next time," Joyce repeated dully. "What next time? There won't ever be anybody else."

"Oh, you're not decrepit yet," Bill said lightly. "There'll be others. You'll meet them in class and at parties and dances."

"I won't go to parties and dances," Joyce said solemnly. "There'll be nobody to take me in the first place."

"Sure there will." Bill was silent a moment. Then suddenly he said, "I'll tell you what. If you and Jeff don't patch things up by the week-end of the Homecoming, why don't I take you to the dance myself?"

"To the dance?" Joyce tried to keep the surprise out of her voice. Despite herself, she cast a quick sideways glance at the shiny chrome of the wheel chair.

Bill caught the look, interpreted it correctly, and grinned.

"Of course, I won't be able to hoof it around with you, but I'll introduce you to a lot of swell guys who will. It'll take your mind off your troubles, and who knows, maybe Jeff'll be there. It could give him a good shaking up to see you with somebody else."

Joyce nodded slowly. "Do you think it would? All right then, Bill, and thank you. I'd like to go with you. But—but if Jeff *should* call in the meantime . . ."

"Then the date's off," Bill said easily, "of course." He gave Joyce a quick comradely pat on the shoulder and swung his chair around toward the door. Then he glanced back over his shoulder. "Might serve a double purpose," he said with a touch of wryness in his voice. "It might give Ginny a jolt to see *me* there with somebody else."

"Ginny!" Joyce stared at him in astonishment. "You mean you—and Ginny Boylston . . ."

But Bill had evidently already said more than he intended to. With a quick movement he shot his chair out into the hall, reached back and pulled the door shut behind him.

7

A Date with Bill

"How formal are you getting tonight, girls—long or short or cocktail length? And do you think this color is too summery for fall?"

Peggy Bennett twirled as she spoke, swishing the full, yellow skirt around in front of the dormitory's one full-length mirror. The mirror was fastened to the pressing room door, and as a result the bleak little room was momentarily jammed with girls, all waiting turns for a brief moment of self-inspection.

"Yellow is pretty much a summer color," Lyn Friche commented, studying her friend carefully. "A deep gold would be different, but this lemony yellow—I don't know. What do you think, Joyce?"

Joyce stood leaning against the edge of the doorway, waiting for her friends to finish their discussion.

"It *is* pretty light," she said trying to sound more interested than she felt. "If you have something else, it might be better to save this one for a spring prom."

The Homecoming Dance was tonight, and the whole campus was bursting with excitement. In Alspaugh Dormitory girls rushed wildly through the halls, their hair up in pin curls, their faces shining with cold cream. Others were busy pressing dresses and trying on shoes and borrowing gloves and stockings and handbags. The loudspeaker in the hall kept up a constant rumble of announcements: "206—TRISH NELSON—TELEPHONE—211—CAROLYN MYRIC—FLOWERS—203—LYN FRICHE . . ."

Everything, Joyce thought miserably, except "204—JOYCE REYNOLDS."

This was not literally correct. The speaker had blared "204—JOYCE REYNOLDS" the night before, but it had only been Bill.

"How about it?" he had asked. "Is our date still on for tomorrow?"

Joyce had pushed the disappointment from her voice and tried to sound happy as she answered, "Yes, Bill. If you still want to take me."

"Swell." Bill's voice was warm and breezy even over the telephone. "I'll be by for you about eight-thirty. It's a good thing you're not turning me down, because I've got some flowers ordered for you. Have they got there yet?"

"Flowers? How wonderful!" He must have been pretty sure, Joyce thought, that Jeff wasn't going to ask me if he went ahead and ordered flowers. "No, they haven't arrived, but when they do I'll stick them *right* in the refrigerator."

"My gosh, is that what girls do with flowers?" Bill laughed. "I don't have a sister, and I'm behind on these details. Okay, freeze them up then. I'll see you tomorrow."

But even then the hope had hung on. Walking back to her room, Joyce had still clung to it, the one chance that the telephone might ring, the speaker might again blast her name, and this time it would be Jeff.

This is ridiculous, she told herself miserably. If Jeff were going to call, he would have done so by now. And even if he *should* call now, it would be too late.

Now, as she stood in the doorway to the pressing room, the evening hung before her—long and dragging—just something to get through somehow. Probably she should have refused Bill in the first place, feeling the way she did, but his invitation had so surprised her that she had agreed before she thought about it. Now she was sorry. Not because she didn't like Bill, but because if she could not go with Jeff, there was really no sense in going at all.

The other girls finished their primping and joined her in the doorway, and together they walked down the hall toward their end of the dormitory.

"Aren't you trying on your dress?" Lyn asked Joyce. "Or are you wearing that cute black number you had on the other night?"

"No," Joyce said quickly, "I'm not wearing that." She could, of course. Bill had never seen it. But that dress was too closely connected with the last evening with Jeff. "I'm wearing my rose," she continued. "It's a short formal, and the color kind of goes with autumn."

"The rose?" Peggy glanced over at her with surprise. "But isn't that what you wore to the Homecoming last year? I remember, because I helped you press it. You don't want to wear the same dress with the same boy . . ."

"It's not the same boy," Joyce said shortly. "I'm going with Bill Johnson."

"Bill Johnson!" Peggy and Lyn echoed her in the same breath. "But who—that is . . ."

"He's a very nice boy," Joyce said firmly. "He's assistant editor of the *Archive*."

"Why, that's fine," Peggy said slowly. "I didn't mean to sound so startled. I just assumed it would be Jeff, that's all. Though now that I think about it, you never actually said it was."

"I assumed it would be too." Lyn said, less apologetically. "Naturally. Why didn't you tell us sooner, Joyce? You knew we'd all be interested."

"I—I thought I had," Joyce said.

The truth was, of course, that she had not wanted to. As long as she did not tell anyone she had a date with Bill, the door would still be open to accept Jeff if he should call. It was much easier to let everyone assume she was dating Jeff and later tell them differently than to have to make explanations if she changed plans.

Not that it mattered, she thought now, one way or the other. I might as well have told them all along.

At the doorway to her room she parted with the girls and went inside. Her biology notebook lay on the desk. Tentatively, Joyce picked it up and flipped it open. The hopeless jumble of its contents caused her to groan and close it again.

I can't study now anyway, she excused herself hastily. Not with all the commotion in the dormitory.

The loudspeaker was a steady rumble of sound. She heard her own name. "JOYCE REYNOLDS—FLOWERS!" It was an excuse for leaving the books and going downstairs. At the desk she accepted the neat, white florist's box. The corsage itself was a small but lovely one of white roses.

Bill's nice, she thought as she put the top carefully back on the box and carried it down the hall to the refrigerator in the dormitory kitchen. Really nice. He didn't have to go to the trouble and expense of getting flowers.

Outside in the parking lot horns were blowing madly. A rumble of male voices sounded from the parlor where the boys waited to pick up their dates for the game.

And then, ten minutes later, there was absolute silence.

It's like a morgue, Joyce thought. Or at least the way I imagine a morgue must be. Has everybody gone to the football game?

It seemed as though they had.

With a sigh Joyce settled herself on her bed and picked up the biology notebook.

Bill had apologized for not taking her to the game too.

"I know a game date and a dance date usually go together at Homecoming," he had said, "but since I can't manage both, wouldn't you rather have me take you to the dance? If you want to see the game, you can always go by yourself, but you can't get to a dance without a date."

Joyce had nodded, surprised. Her bewilderment must have been evident, for Bill had given a quick explanation.

"I don't have the get-up-and-go I had before I got sick," he had said lightly. "I wear out quicker than most guys. If I'm going out for a gala evening, I've got to take it easy in the afternoon." For an instant he had looked embarrassed. "It's just one of those things."

"That's all right," Joyce had said quickly. "I don't really care about the game anyway."

It was true. She did not care about the game. But now, sitting alone in her room, the heavy silence of the empty dormitory was more oppressive than she could have imagined. She opened her books and tried to concentrate on them. An hour ago she had excused herself as being unable to study because of the noise. Now it was the silence that was distracting. Keeping her eyes determinedly on the pages before her, she found herself listening, straining her ears for footsteps and voices and banging doors. Without them the dormitory seemed unnatural.

Then suddenly she did hear a sound. Water running. Through the quiet of the building the ordinarily unnoticed sound came like the roaring of a waterfall. On an impulse, Joyce dumped her books on to the bed and got up to investigate.

The girl in the washroom was Kathy Meadows, and she was rolling up her hair. She turned as Joyce came in and gave her a shy smile.

"What are you doing here, Joyce? I thought everyone was at the game."

"My date couldn't make it," Joyce said, "and I didn't want to bother going by myself. Now I wish I had. How come you didn't go?"

"I thought I'd stay here and use the washroom while I could," Kathy said. "I know that later there's going to be a run on it, with everybody getting ready for the dance. I wanted to take a lot of time getting ready—get my hair just right and take a nice long bubble bath and—and . . ." She blushed. "Joyce, this is going to be my first date!"

"Your first date!" Joyce echoed in amazement. A sophomore in college having her first date! And then, immediately, she was not surprised at all. A memory of last year's Kathy came to her mind—a fat, awkward girl with cold blue eyes and a stiff unfriendly attitude with everyone. How different she was then from the girl standing before the mirror now!

A year had made a tremendous difference in Kathy. She was much prettier for one thing; she had lost a lot of weight and dressed neatly and took pains with her appearance. But the real difference lay in the girl herself. She was trying to be friendly, to like people and to let them know she liked them. She was still shy, but it was a gentle shyness rather than a cold wall built up around herself, and the other girls in the dormitory were responding to this new warmth and making her one of them as they had never done last year.

It had been hard for her to do. Joyce knew this, better perhaps than anyone else, for she knew Kathy's difficult home life and the things that had made her so unhappy and defensive. And it had been Joyce, with Jeff's help, who had broken through this barrier with a first offer of friendship last year.

Now she smiled.

"Who's the boy tonight? Somebody special?"

Kathy smiled back, her eyes shining.

"His name's Matt Hereford and he's—he's—oh, I can't describe him, Joyce! He's in my logic class, and ever since school started this semester, I've been kind of—of—aiming at him." She flushed again. "That sounds so horrible—'aiming at him' like I was a big game hunter or something! What I mean is—is . . ."

Joyce laughed out loud at the girl's discomfort. " 'Aiming at him' is a grand description! And for goodness' sake, don't worry about it. We all do the same thing! You should have seen Betty last year, before she started going steady with Tim! She'd set her sights on a boy and map out a campaign and plunge right in, smiling and fluttering her eyelashes and looking admiring, and darned if she didn't land him every time!"

Kathy laughed too.

"That makes me feel better," she said happily. "You know, Joyce, this is the first time I've ever *tried* to get a boy to like me. I mean, smiled and talked to him and—well, I still can't believe it's working! But it must be, because he asked me for a date! And not just an ordinary date—a Homecoming date!"

"That's wonderful," Joyce said warmly. "And you deserve it, Kathy, if anyone ever did! I hope Matt turns out to be even more wonderful than you think he is!"

Kathy's happiness was catching. Joyce found herself carrying it with her as she walked back down the hall, a warm little glow of excitement in anticipation of the evening ahead. And what she had said to Kathy was true; she *did* deserve it. This miraculous change was one which the girl had brought about herself. Happiness had not come easily to Kathy. There had been many things against it, things she made herself overcome.

Joyce felt suddenly ashamed of herself.

"Here I am with a wonderful family, marvelous friends, a pretty good figure, decent looks and a date tonight with a nice boy; and all I've done for weeks is make myself miserable over something that's already happened and can't be undone. What was it Bill told me to do? 'Chalk it up to experience.' All right, I will." Jeff's face rose up before her, the square chin, the warm dark eyes, the quiet strength. Determinedly she pushed it aside. "No more mooning," she told herself briskly. "I've done enough of that. From now on I concentrate on other things. First I'll crack down and really dig into this biology for a couple of hours, then I'll press my dress and get things ready for the dance. And I'll have a grand time tonight. I'll *make* myself have a grand time! And I'll see that Bill does too!"

Surprisingly, this was easier than she imagined. When she threw herself wholeheartedly into the distasteful biology, she found it was not as hard to understand as when she glanced at her notes for only a few minutes at a time. It seemed just a little while before voices were sounding in the halls, doors were slamming, and the dormitory was coming alive again with its usual activities.

"Ready to eat?" Peggy Bennett appeared in the doorway. "The cafeteria will be open in a couple of minutes."

"But it's only five o'clock!" Joyce exclaimed.

"So what? It'll give us plenty of time to get dressed afterwards. Besides, who wants to eat an hour before a party? I, for one, would be too excited to swallow!"

"You're crazy!" Joyce said, laughing. But she got up and slammed her notebook shut. "Well, all right. I've done enough studying this afternoon to last me quite a while. And for some unknown reason, I *am* hungry!"

They were served quickly, as the cafeteria was not yet filled with its usual crowd, and returned to the dormitory and the hectic excitement of pre-party preparations.

Steam poured out of the washroom door. The phone rang, the speaker blared, messengers arrived with corsages. In one of the rooms someone was playing dance music on a phonograph, and the rhythm invaded the whole second floor and added to the atmosphere of anticipation. By the time the speaker boomed "204—JOYCE REYNOLDS—CALLER!" Joyce found that she too was filled with a glow of excitement.

"Hey, there!" Bill gave her his friendly grin. "You look pretty sharp! Flowers okay?"

"Just right," Joyce said. "And thank you!"

They were right—white and sweet and delicate on the shoulder of the rose-colored formal.

"Glad you like them," Bill said. "Choosing corsages isn't my forte. I'm afraid I always head straight for roses; they're the only flowers I can remember."

It was only after they left the dormitory that Joyce began to have some qualms about the evening. To begin with, she had never before walked with anyone who was in a wheel chair. She hesitated for a moment but Bill was already spinning himself efficiently down the walk. The chair was too wide to make walking beside it possible on the narrow walkways and Joyce found herself forced to trot along in the grass at the side or directly in front or behind. She chose the grass and soon was sorry she had, for her high heels sank awkwardly into the soft earth.

"Why don't you walk in front," Bill said. "That's pretty hard going in those shoes, isn't it?"

"No," Joyce assured him untruthfully, "not at all." But she was very relieved when they reached the parking lot.

She was surprised when Bill stopped beside a car and swung open the door on the passenger's side.

"Excuse me for getting in first, but I've got to get in from this side, and I couldn't do it if you were already sitting here."

Even in the shadows he caught the look on her face. It was a look, Joyce realized afterwards, that he must have seen on many faces at various times.

"I can drive all right," he explained. "I've got this rigged with hand controls. The dashboard may look like a machine shop, but it works, which is what matters."

"It certainly is!" Joyce exclaimed. "I think it's wonderful the way you do everything everybody else does! That is—I mean . . ." She felt her face growing hot as she realized how the words sounded. "I mean even with your—your—handicap . . ."

"It sure is a handicap, but I'm working on it. There's a rehabilitation clinic in Raleigh and I go over there twice a week. Who knows, maybe one of these days I'll be able to get around without my 'buggy'!"

"You mean you'll be able to walk?" Joyce asked eagerly.

"Well, not exactly that. But I should be able to manage with crutches or canes. That is, if I keep working on it. How about giving me a hand getting the chair into the back seat?"

Still flushing from her unthinking comment, Joyce helped him fold the chair and held the front seat forward while Bill, with surprising efficiency, hauled it into the back. Then she got in beside him and shut the door.

"I'm sorry," she said awkwardly as Bill started the engine. "I didn't mean it to sound the way it did—about your legs. It's just—well, to tell the truth, I guess I'd actually forgotten about them. You surprised me, and I spoke before I thought."

"That's okay," Bill said easily, swinging the car out of the parking lot. "It's a compliment really that you could forget. And anyway, I'm not sensitive about it. It's natural people should be curious." He was silent a moment, and then he continued more hesitantly. "That's not exactly true—what I just said. I *am* sensitive about it, but I'm learning not to be. The way I figure it, Joyce, I can't afford to worry about what people think and say, and whether they look at me sideways, and whether they're sorry for me, and so on. I'd be worrying about it my whole life if I did. And I don't want to waste my life that way. I've got too much I want to do."

Joyce felt her pity beginning to give way to admiration for this boy beside her.

"What?" she asked gently. "What are you going to do?"

"Lots of things. Edit a magazine, for one. Oh, I know I can't start out as an editor, but it's where I'm heading —right for the top! I like magazine work, and I know I could build up a magazine into something people would run out and buy! I've got so many ideas . . ." He grinned suddenly. "That's why I get so darned mad at Ginny. That stubborn kid—if she'd just come down off her high horse and give my ideas a chance with the *Archive* . . ."

"But I thought . . ." Joyce was confused. "From what you said the other day . . ."

Bill nodded. "Yeah, I gave myself away, didn't I? So, you know—it's Ginny. Always has been, ever since grammar school. We're from the same town, you know; went all through school together. Ginny was a year behind me then; she caught up and passed me when I got sick. We fought like cats and dogs all the time—and still, it's Ginny for me. And you know one thing I like most about her? This sounds crazy." He shook his head at his own idiocy. "When I got sick during my last year in high school, there I was, Billy Johnson, tennis champ and track star, flat on my back and probably going to stay there. Everybody was hovering over me, being so sweet and sticky and doing everything I wanted—and you know what Ginny did? She fought with me. Just like she always had. She'd come visit, and we'd sit and argue the whole time she was there. It drove Mother frantic. One time she practically threw Ginny out of the house because she yelled at me! But she kept coming back. After the sweet ones got tired of coming and found other heroes to cheer for, Ginny still stopped by after school a couple of afternoons a week to fight with me. That's my Ginny!"

"Why didn't you ask Ginny to the Homecoming?" she asked curiously.

"Two reasons," Bill said lightly. "Number one, I knew Bryan Parkley was going to ask her, and I thought if she had a couple of dates with him, she wouldn't be so fascinated by his poetry. And number two, if I turned up with a cute blonde, it might stir things up a little. Besides," and he grinned sideways at Joyce as he pulled the car into a parking space beside the auditorium, "I think you and I will have fun together. Don't you?"

"Yes," Joyce exclaimed, "I know we will!"

And they did. Joyce knew, when she went back to the dormitory that night, that the dance would stay in her mind always as one of the loveliest she had ever attended. The auditorium with its streamers of rose and gold, the paper lanterns that glowed around the edges of the dance floor, the music that seemed to sweep the whole thing into one glorious dancing dream. One by one she caught sight of most of her friends—Trish—Peggy—Lyn. Once she saw a radiant blonde girl she knew looked familiar and then, to her amazement, she realized that it was Kathy Meadows, her face glowing as she laughed up at the boy she was dancing with. Joyce tried to get a look at the boy himself, but they whirled and were lost among the dancing couples before she had a chance. She did see Betty and Tim, however. They stopped briefly to speak to her and get introduced to Bill. Betty looked lovely, like an enchanting pixie in a swirling dress of forest green, but something was lacking—perhaps it was the sparkle that Kathy seemed to have this evening.

"Tim is bored," she confided to Joyce in a whisper under cover of the music. "He says he had enough of school dances and fruit juice punch when he was in high school. He wants to leave and find something more exciting to do."

"Are *you* bored?" Joyce asked. "You always loved college dances last year."

"I know," Betty said, "but it's no fun being at a dance with somebody who isn't enjoying it."

"Cute girl," Bill remarked, after Betty and Tim had left the table. "Or she would be if she weren't so tense."

"Tense!" Joyce exclaimed. "Betty? Why she's the gayest, most carefree girl . . ."

"Really? Well, maybe so. It was just the impression I got. Oh, hi, Terry!" Bill turned to greet a tall, sandy-haired boy who was approaching their table. "I'd like you to meet Joyce Reynolds!"

Joyce had not expected to do any actual dancing that evening. She was surprised and delighted a few moments later to find herself circling the dance floor with Terry's arm around her waist. She was even more surprised soon afterwards to find herself on the floor again with another boy, a boy named Peter Shay. And then she stopped being surprised, for it seemed she never left the dance floor. As one boy ushered her back to the table, another of Bill's friends arrived to be introduced and to whirl her away for a dance.

By the end of the evening Joyce was exhausted, but happily exhausted. It was with complete sincerity that she could say to Bill as they pulled into the parking lot behind the dormitory, "I've had a wonderful time! One of the best times I've ever had at a dance!"

Bill looked pleased.

"I'm glad. I hoped you would. I did too." He hesitated and then said, "Would you mind if I didn't walk you up to the dorm? I'd like to, but getting out and into the car and setting up the chair and all . . ."

"Of course, I wouldn't mind." Joyce opened the door beside her and then turned back. She wanted to say something that would show Bill how much the evening had really meant to her. It was hard to find the right words. Finally she said, "At the dance tonight, I was having such a good time, I almost forgot to look around to see if Jeff was there."

"Well, what do you know!" Bill said in amusement. "I guess you *did* have a good time then! And you made some conquests too. Terry Adams asked me what dormitory you were in. And the way Pete Shay kept cutting in on you, I bet you hear from him pretty soon." He grinned with such delighted satisfaction that Joyce found herself laughing back at him.

"I'm now queen of the campus!" she said. "And all thanks to you!" But beneath the lightness of the words there was real gratitude, and Bill knew it, because for an instant his voice sobered.

"You'll make it all right, kid," he said gently. "We all get broken up over things sometimes, but you'll make it all right."

Because the evening had been such an unexpectedly good one and the warmth of the music and fun still clung to her, Joyce felt almost surprised when she opened the door to her room and saw Stella sitting at her desk, as usual bent intently over her books.

She turned as Joyce came in.

"Hello there! You look so nice. Did you have a good time?"

"Yes," Joyce said, "a grand time. Have you been studying all evening long?"

"Yes," Stella said, "and I got a lot done too; the dorm was so quiet."

Joyce nodded. She knew how quiet the dormitory was when everyone else was out on dates. How quiet and how depressing. She had found that out herself this afternoon.

This is wrong, she thought.

Why it was wrong she could not say. It was a feeling rather than a thought. It was fine for Stella to study hard and make good grades, especially in view of her ambition to become a doctor, but still there was something wrong, terribly wrong, with the picture before her—this quiet, serious girl bent studiously over her books while everyone else was out having a good time.

It's not natural, Joyce thought, it just isn't *healthy* for a sophomore in college to do *nothing* but study! If only someone had asked Stella to the dance tonight . . .

And then, immediately, she remembered that Stella *had* been invited to the dance. Jeff had asked her. And she had turned him down without a moment's hesitation—because of Joyce.

She threw away a whole evening, Joyce thought guiltily, just to spare my feelings! And what have I ever done for her? Nothing. Not one thing, ever. I've never really even thought about Stella—she's so quiet—it's so easy to forget her.

Suddenly, impulsively, she tossed her evening bag onto the bed and crossed the room to her roommate.

"It's only six weeks till vacation, Stell. Why don't you come home with me for Christmas?"

8

Christmas Vacation

"There's a grove of some kind, but I don't see any oranges! Maybe they're all on the other side of the trees. There's a palm tree! Oh, and there's another one! That clump up near the top, Joyce—is that coconuts?"

Joyce raised her eyes from her magazine and smiled across at the eager girl opposite her. She had never seen Stella so excited. From the moment they had boarded the train the night before, she had been a different girl from the solemn, studious one Joyce had come to know at college. She sat now with her face almost pressed against the train window, exclaiming with delight over each new thing that flashed by.

"Maybe they were coconuts," Joyce said, "but I doubt it. There aren't nearly as many coconut palms in Florida as most people think. More likely it was just a clump of Spanish moss."

"I bet it was coconuts," Stella insisted. "I'm almost sure it was!"

"Well, maybe so," Joyce said good-naturedly, turning back to her magazine. "If there are any coconuts or oranges or anything else, you'll be the one to see them. You've been glued to that window since six o'clock this morning!"

Joyce herself had made the trip back and forth between Raleigh and Sarasota too many times to be more than fleetingly interested in the scenery. The orange groves and palm trees were to her no more than signs that she was approaching home. In themselves they were of limited interest, for they had been part of the background of her life ever since childhood. The fascination with which other people seemed to regard them never ceased to amaze her.

Now, still smiling at Stella's excitement, she was glad all over again that she had invited her home for Christmas vacation. She had done it impulsively. If she had stopped to think about it, she would probably not have done so, for the moment the words were out of her mouth she had stopped uncertainly, wondering if she should try to call them back. Stella, quiet, intense Stella, spending the holidays with her, living with her family, meeting her friends—how would she fit in? She was so different from any friend Joyce had ever had before. What would everyone think of her, and she of them?

But as soon as she saw Stella's face, she realized there was no withdrawing the invitation. Stella was gazing at her with incredulous wonder.

"Come home with you to Florida! Oh, Joyce! Do you think it would be all right with your family? I mean, I wouldn't be butting in or anything?"

"Of course you wouldn't," Joyce said warmly, her regrets already softening in the face of the other girl's delight. "They'll be glad to have you. I've told Mother so much about you that she's dying to meet you. She's never forgiven me for not introducing you to her last year when they stopped by Denton on the way to Dad's business convention."

"Really? You really mean it?" Stella's thin face was glowing with excitement. "Oh, Joyce, I just don't know what to say. Going to Florida—it's always been a dream with me, something that just *might* happen some day in the far, far future but probably wouldn't! And now, to really have a chance to go, and to spend Christmas . . ." She broke off suddenly. "Wait, I forgot something. You go home by train, don't you? The whole way by train?"

Joyce nodded. "It's an easy trip really; you just get on at Raleigh and go to bed, and get up and have breakfast, and there you are in Sarasota. It's much easier than going by car."

It was as though a light had faded inside of Stella. "Then I won't be able to do it. I—I could never afford the ticket."

This was something that had not even occurred to Joyce. If she had stopped to think, it would have; but as it was, she was so accustomed to her parents providing train tickets back and forth to college that it was something she took for granted. When she was ready to make the trip, a ticket was there, unasked for, waiting for her to use it. Of course, it would not be this way for Stella. To her the price of a train ticket would be staggering.

"That's a shame," she started to say regretfully, and then an idea occurred to her. "It doesn't matter though. For my Christmas present this year, my folks are giving me an extra round-trip ticket to Florida. They said I could use it to bring home anyone I wanted to, to spend the vacation."

Stella shook her head. "I couldn't accept anything like that. Thank you anyway, Joyce, but your folks don't even know me, and to give me anything as expensive as a train ticket to . . ."

"They're not giving it to *you;*" Joyce interrupted, "they're giving it to *me,* to use any way I want to. And I want to use it on you. So stop being stubborn about it."

Stella was never to know about the air-mail letter that went off the next day to Mr. and Mrs. Reynolds in Florida, or of the long, uneasy hours Joyce put in until the reply arrived in her mailbox. "All right, dear, if what you really want for Christmas is a train ticket for Stella, that's what we will give you. Remember, though, this is your Christmas present, and it's taking the place of the dresses and books and everything else."

But Joyce had had no regrets about it, not really. She was rewarded many times over by Stella herself and the excitement and anticipation with which she awaited the holidays.

And now they were here.

"We're slowing down," Stella observed from her position by the window. "It looks as though we're coming into a station. Is this it, Joyce? Is this Sarasota?"

Joyce glanced up from her magazine again. "I don't think it could be. We're not due in for twenty minutes yet, and trains are *never* early."

But she was interrupted by a porter's voice calling, "Sarasota! Everybody off for Sarasota!" And a few moments later, after a hurried scramble for hats and purses, she found herself standing on the familiar station platform with her mother's arms around her in a welcoming hug.

"Joyce, baby! It's so wonderful to have you home! And this must be Stella! We're so happy to have you, dear. Joyce has told us so much about you, we feel as though you're an old friend already." Mrs. Reynolds always seemed to know the right thing to say to make people feel at home, for with that warm greeting it was as though Stella was drawn immediately into the heart of the family.

"Hi, sis! You're getting skinny in your old age! Here, let me handle that junk for you." It was Randall, longer and lankier than ever, taking her bags with one hand and giving her a brotherly thump on the back with the other. Joyce had a sudden impulse to kiss him, it was so awfully good to see him again, but as she moved toward him he recoiled with fifteen-year-old horror and she contented herself with an affectionate punch in his ribs instead.

And then they were all in the car, and there were so many questions to be asked, so many things that could not be crammed into letters, that it seemed as though they had hardly left the station before they pulled into the driveway and were home.

"This is it!" Joyce announced to Stella, seizing her hand and drawing her through the door into the familiar interior. "This is the living room and—oh, Mother, you've made new slip covers! They're darling! Come on upstairs, Stell, and see my room. Randall, you can't handle all those bags at one time, let Stella and me haul some of them too. Mother, do you know if Margo's home yet? I think the University of Florida was supposed to be out a few days before Denton."

"Calm down, darling," Mrs. Reynolds laughed. "Stella is going to be so rattled she'll turn around and go back to Denton again! Yes, Margo's home; she called yesterday to see when you were arriving. Frank called too. He wants you to go water skiing tomorrow morning."

"Water skiing? That would be fun. Have you ever tried it, Stella?"

"No," Stella said, "but I'd like to." She looked confused. "Isn't Frank the boy you went with in high school, the one whose picture you used to keep on your bureau when you first started college?"

"Yes." Joyce smiled, remembering. "My first steady! It seems so long ago. He and Margo started going together at the University last year, and I guess they're pretty serious. Margo was my best friend back in high school. I guess Frank called because he knows Randall has water skis."

"That's okay with me," Randall said good-naturedly. "Frank's brother has a boat, so we may as well get together and pool our resources. Hey, do you want *all* this stuff in your room, sis? What did you bring home anyway—everything in the dormitory?"

"Don't be so smart," Joyce told him. "That heavy bag has a Christmas present in it for you!" She was still holding Stella's hand and now she drew her over to the stairs. "Let's go up and get settled, and then Randall and I will show you around Sarasota!"

Once up in Joyce's room, Stella looked around in undisguised admiration.

"It's lovely," she said, "so big and comfortable! Why my bedroom at home is only half this size and when I'm there I share it with two sisters!"

"It is nice, I guess," Joyce said easily. "I'm so used to it, I never really think about it. Here, Stell, Mother's emptied this top drawer so you can have a place to put your things. You go ahead and start unpacking, and I'll call Margo and see if she wants to come along with us on our sightseeing tour."

But Margo, when she called her, had a surprise to offer.

"The most wonderful thing, Joyce!" she bubbled. "The most wonderful, marvelous, exciting thing you can think of! I was going to write you, but I thought I'd wait until I could tell you in person. I'm engaged!"

"You're engaged!" Joyce exclaimed in amazement. "But Margo, how can you be! I mean, you're so young!"

"I'm not 'so young,'" Margo contradicted. "I'm nineteen; that's plenty old enough for a girl to get engaged! And my fiancé is twenty-two."

"Twenty-two!" Joyce echoed. "But Frank's not twenty-two, Margo. He's exactly the same age we are."

"It's not Frank, silly!" Margo sounded impatient. "My fiancé's name is Warren Chandler. He's a senior at the University, and just absolutely super! He's here visiting me now over Christmas vacation. I'm dying for you to meet him!"

"I—I'd love to." Joyce was too shaken to continue the conversation. "Look, Margo, I've brought home a house guest too, my roommate from college, and I'll have to hang up and go see if she's getting settled all right. I'll call you back later."

"All right." Margo sounded hurt. "Aren't you going to congratulate me?"

"Oh, of course!" Joyce said belatedly. "Congratulations! And—and lots and lots of happiness!"

She stood there a moment by the telephone after she had placed the receiver back on the hook. It was impossible to believe. Margo engaged!

Why, Margo's the same age as I am! We were in the same class in high school. We were best friends for years, sharing everything, telling each other all our secrets. Margo isn't any older, any more mature that I am! And now she's engaged and ready to be married.

And not to Frank! That thought came next, equally startling. To some stranger, a boy named Warren Chandler; and Frank—why, if Frank called to go water skiing tomorrow, he must have meant just himself, and not Margo too! He must have meant to be asking me for a date!

To date Frank again, after almost two whole years, to have Margo engaged to be married—it was all too confusing. Joyce shook her head and, pushing the whole situation as far back in her mind as she could, went back to her room.

"Come on, Stella," she said, "let's get started on our sightseeing tour. I want you to see everything you can before it gets dark."

Showing off Sarasota was a satisfying experience, and Joyce found herself experiencing a pride in her own home town that she had not known she possessed. Stella, sitting in the front seat between Joyce and Randall, was enthusiastic about everything. The beaches, the palm trees, the jungle growth of palmetto shrubs, the one-story homes in their soft pastel colors, the bright bursts of hibiscus and bougainvillea and poinsettia, all were things to be wondered at and exclaimed over.

"I feel," Stella said excitedly, "like Alice in Wonderland! This is a place I've always dreamed about, and now I'm here!" They were just passing Lido Casino, and she gestured toward the stretch of white beach, spotted with bright umbrellas. "Is this where we're going to water ski tomorrow?"

"No," Randall told her, "we'll go over to Big Pass to do that. That's a more deserted place and we won't have to worry about people in the water." He glanced over at her in amusement. "You sure you want to try it? Sis here just about had her arms pulled out of their sockets last summer when she was learning."

"I certainly *do* want to try it!" Stella said quickly. "This may be the only time in my life I'll ever be here. I want to try everything."

She's so different from the way she is at college, Joyce thought wonderingly, watching the other girl's eager face. Jeff said something about Stella once—last year it was. "She's had some tough breaks, and she's worked hard to overcome them. She's worked *too* hard. She's never learned to play." I didn't believe him at the time. But now—why, you would hardly know she was the same girl!

When they reached home again, Mr. Reynolds had returned from work, and there was another joyful reunion. They ate a leisurely dinner served on a table on the porch.

"We're having such amazingly warm weather for December," Mrs. Reynolds said, "that we might as well eat out here and take advantage of it while we can. We can't count on its lasting." She glanced over at Joyce. "Is anything the matter, honey? You used to put away a lot more fried chicken than that before you went to college."

"She's probably dieting," Randall said teasingly. "All college girls diet; it's a college requirement!"

Joyce wrinkled her nose at him before answering.

"No, Mother, everything's wonderful. I guess I must have been going too heavily on the sweets lately. I think I'm getting some kind of a sore in my mouth; anyway it hurts me a little to chew."

"All those cookies Lyn Friche's mother sends," Stella reminded her. "We eat as many of them as she does."

"That's probably it." Joyce agreed. "This will teach me a lesson about making a pig of myself."

By the end of the evening, however, she could no longer speak lightly about it. In a few hours' time she was no longer able to close her teeth. She took an aspirin before going to bed, but even that did not seem to make the ache any less, and after a restless night, she rose the next morning to find her whole jaw swollen.

"Is your throat sore?" Mrs. Reynolds looked worried. "You've never had mumps, you know. Although the swelling does seem to be in the wrong place for mumps."

"It's not my throat," Joyce insisted. "It's my mouth. I'd say it was a toothache, except it seems to be back behind my teeth."

"Ride in town with me," her mother said, "when I take your father in to work. We can stop at the doctor's on the way back."

"All right," Joyce said. The pain was so bad that she was very close to tears. "I just hope he can give me something to make this feel a little better."

Randall, who had been concentrating on his scrambled eggs, glanced up quickly.

"What about the water skiing? Frank is coming by for us this morning."

Joyce shook her head. "I'm afraid I'll have to skip the skiing. I feel too awful to have any fun. You and Stella go ahead."

"No," Stella said quickly, "I don't want to go without you, Joyce. I'll ride in to the doctor's with you."

"That's crazy," Randall objected. "Just because one of you can't go, it doesn't mean you both can't! This isn't our normal winter weather, and it's not going to hold out long. If you want a chance to learn to ski, Stella, you'd better go while the going's good."

"Randall's right," Joyce said, wincing slightly because her jaw hurt even when she spoke. "I'll tell you what, you two go ahead with Frank when he comes. Then, when I'm through at the doctor's, I'll come over to Big Pass and join you. I may not feel up to skiing, but at least I can sit and applaud as you go whizzing by."

Stella hesitated. Joyce could see she was sorely tempted.

"Are you sure you want to do it that way? I feel so guilty going out to have a good time while you're at the doctor's. I'd be glad to go with you."

"Don't be silly," Joyce said. Her whole head was beginning to ache, and she was not in a mood for polite arguing. "I can always ski, and this may be your one chance. Besides, I'll be over at the beach in about an hour to meet you."

As it turned out, however, it was quite a lot longer than an hour before Joyce returned from town, and when she did it was to go straight home and to bed. The doctor to whom she went sent her over to a dentist, and the swelling turned out to be caused by an impacted wisdom tooth. Having the tooth pulled turned out to be a major operation, and when it was over, it was all Joyce could do to drag herself out to the car with her mother's help and, once home, to climb the stairs to her room.

"At least, it happened the first day of vacation," she said as she collapsed on her bed. "By tonight the ache should be gone and I can start enjoying things."

"Well . . ." Her mother looked doubtful. "I wouldn't count on recovering so fast, honey. Having an impacted tooth removed isn't the same thing as having an ordinary tooth out. It's often real surgery."

"Still, it's out now," Joyce said. "And it can't keep on aching."

"Just expect some after-surgery reactions," Mrs. Reynolds said gently. "Then you won't be too disturbed if they do occur. Now, take some of the little pills the dentist gave you and lie down and try to rest. I'll go get you an ice bag."

The little pills had their effect, and Joyce did sleep. She slept, in fact, for over four hours. When she awoke, it was mid-afternoon and the ache was still there. She found that she could hardly open her mouth.

"Mother!" Her voice was a hoarse croak of terror. "What's the matter with me!"

"Nothing abnormal, dear," Mrs. Reynolds said soothingly. "Your jaw has swollen even more, that's all. It's what I thought would probably happen."

Joyce dragged herself up in bed and looked across into the dressing-room mirror. What she saw made her gasp in horror.

"I'm blue! Dark blue—the whole side of my face all the way down into my neck!"

"It's bruised," Mrs. Reynolds said soothingly. "That's natural too. You should have seen me when I had my wisdom teeth out. I had all four out at once, and I couldn't open my mouth for a full week."

"But, I look horrible! Just horrible!" Joyce's eyes filled with tears. "Oh, Mother, I can't look like this during the entire vacation!"

"No, of course you won't," Mrs. Reynolds comforted. "You'll be back to normal in a few days; wait and see if you aren't. By the way, Randall and Stella are back. Stella's been waiting for you to wake up. I'll call her and tell her."

She went out of the room and a few minutes later Stella entered. She was wearing pedal pushers and a T-shirt, and her dark hair was hanging in wet ringlets around her face. Her face was red and her eyes were shining, and she seemed to glow with well-being.

"Joyce," she exclaimed before she was all the way into the room, "I've never had a more heavenly time in my whole life! It took me about twenty tries before I got all the way to my feet on those skis, but once I did, it was just like flying! I've never . . ." She gave a startled little gasp as she caught sight of Joyce's face. "Oh, you poor thing! Does it hurt terribly?"

"It doesn't feel exactly good," Joyce said dryly. She knew it was unfair, but the sight of Stella, sparkling from her happy morning, made her feel a little resentful. "You've got a sunburn."

"I know, but not a bad one. Frank made me plaster myself with sunburn ointment before we even got in the boat." Stella seated herself on the edge of Joyce's bed and gazed at her sympathetically. "I wish you could have come too. It would have been perfect if only you could have been along."

"Well, it couldn't be helped," Joyce said, somewhat mollified. "What do you think of Frank? Did he seem all broken up about Margo?"

"He's very nice," Stella said warmly, "and a lot of fun. I see why you used to like him so much. Of course, he isn't as old as Jeff and doesn't have his maturity, but he's so easy to get along with." She smiled, a bright happy smile. "He wants us to go to the movies with him tonight

—that musical at the 'Florida.' He's coming by for us at eight."

"Go to the movies? Like this?" Joyce shook her head, flinching at the sharp pains that shot down her neck as she moved. "Not I. Maybe another time."

"But you're going to have to sit somewhere," Stella argued. "Your face isn't going to ache any worse in a movie than at home."

"But at home nobody has to look at me," Joyce answered.

It was not until after Christmas had come and gone that Joyce found she could look at herself in the mirror again without cringing. The hideous black and blue marks faded slowly, and the swelling remained even longer.

It was Stella and Randall who went in Frank's car to select a Christmas tree.

"How horrible," Stella exclaimed, "to charge seven dollars for a tree! Why, up north we get them for next to nothing."

"These trees are imported, you little Yankee!" Frank said in amusement, as he dragged the fragrant evergreen through the front door into the living room. "We pay for the tree plus shipping charges."

"How silly!" Stella said gaily. "If I were you I'd decorate a palm tree instead of paying that much for a fir."

Joyce, who was busily testing the strings of colored lights, glanced up quickly at the lilt in Stella's voice. It was a new sound, a gay, light-hearted note that she had never heard there before.

Could it be, she thought wonderingly, could it actually be . . .

Stella was standing, steadying the tree as Frank adjusted the stand beneath it. She was kidding him about something, and he was grinning up at her—that old, cocky grin that Joyce remembered so well from high school days, that heart-tugging grin that had always been so impossible for a girl to resist. And now, even now, Joyce could not resist it completely, for it brought with it memories of wonderful days, of parties and dances and a sweater with a football letter on it and a good-night kiss on the porch steps and a class ring—all the fragile, wonderful things that make up a girl's first love.

But he's not right for Stella—not Frank—not for Stella!

The thought came quickly on the heels of the memories, for there were other things to remember. Frank wasn't a studious boy, he loved his sports much better than his studies. He loved dances and parties and doing things with the crowd. He was easygoing and sure of himself and maybe a little conceited. But he could give a girl a marvelous time; he could make her feel pretty and shining and important.

Watching Stella's face, Joyce was sure that that was just the way she was feeling now.

She turned slowly and saw that her mother also was watching Stella and Frank, and she was smiling.

"Do you think it's a good thing?" Joyce asked her later, when the two of them were alone in the kitchen for a moment. "Frank doesn't have anything in common with

Stella. He's just turning on the old charm and making her feel good."

"So," Mrs. Reynolds said, "what's wrong with that? Isn't that the important thing right now, to bring Stella out of her shell and give her a happy vacation?"

"Well, yes, of course," Joyce began, "but I'd hate for her to get hurt."

"Honey," her mother's voice was gentle, "don't worry so much. Stella's in a different boat from the rest of you girls. She's serious about one thing in life right now—becoming a doctor. She isn't looking for a love to last her the rest of her life; she's not ready for that yet, and she wouldn't know what to do about it if it happened. What she needs right now is some careless, happy dating, a boy to make her laugh and feel pretty; and heaven knows, that's Frank's real talent!"

"But if she should get hurt . . ." Joyce began again.

"She would survive," Mrs. Reynolds said lightly, "just like all the rest of us have."

She smiled when she said it, and Joyce wondered with a start just how much her mother knew about her break-up with Jeff. She had not talked to her about it; not because she wanted it secret, but simply because she was trying to forget, and hashing it over again would do no good.

"We all survive," her mother said again, more gently this time, and Joyce felt that the words were meant for her.

The second week of vacation was a better one. Although the stubborn black and blue marks had not entirely faded, Joyce looked enough better so that she was not ashamed to venture out to face the world. She was able to go water skiing once before the weather became too cold. She dropped in on Margo and met her fiancé, a pleasant, mild-mannered young man. She had expected somehow to find Margo changed, quieter perhaps and less bubbly, with the new maturity that Joyce somehow thought an engaged girl should have. But it was the same lively, irrepressible Margo she had known in high school who opened the door to her and welcomed her with an excited bear hug.

And there were parties—an engagement party for Margo and a big New Year's Eve formal at the Country Club. Stella went to both of these with Frank, and several of Frank's old cronies, home too for the holidays, were happy to escort Joyce. The parties were composed of the crowd she had known since childhood, and she found herself enjoying them very much.

It did not seem possible that two whole weeks had passed when they found themselves standing again on the station platform, saying their good-bys.

"Good-by—good-by everybody. Write often. It's been so wonderful—such a marvelous Christmas, the best one ever. Randall, you write too."

Joyce was still calling back to them as the train moved away.

"It *was* the best Christmas ever," Stella said quietly as they found their seats and settled themselves for the long ride back to Denton. "I want to thank you, Joyce, to try to make you know how much this vacation has meant to me, but I don't know how. It's been an introduction to a kind of life I've never known before, a kind of family I've never known. I—I think maybe I'd never really known what fun was before either."

Joyce was greatly moved, realizing how much this statement meant from undemonstrative Stella.

"It was fun for me too," she said simply. "Much more fun because you were there."

Which was true. It had been fun—a wonderful Christmas.

She kept her mind on this, thinking about it, letting the memory of the Christmas festivities lie on the top of her mind as she settled herself to the rhythm of the train and leaned back drowsily in her seat. Perhaps if she concentrated on it, kept thinking about it, the other thought would not enter—that from Jeff there had not been even a Christmas card.

9

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"Bill! I got your note. What on earth has happened?"

Breathless and red-cheeked from her walk through the crisp winter air, Joyce closed the door of the *Archive* office behind her and hurried over to where Bill sat alone at the end of a long table with sheets of paper spread out every which way before him.

" 'Something has happened. Must talk to you immediately. Come over to the office as soon as you can.' I didn't even stop to comb my hair; I just threw on a coat and came running."

"I'm glad you did." Bill looked up from his papers. "I didn't want to do anything until I'd talked to you. Hey, you look kind of peaked. Anything the matter?"

"I had a wisdom tooth extracted over the holidays," Joyce explained, taking a seat beside him. "I'm fine now, but it leaves you kind of washed-out afterwards."

"I guess so." Bill did not look too concerned. "If you think you had troubles, wait till you hear what happened to Ginny. She got the measles."

"The measles!" Joyce exclaimed. "But that's a children's disease."

"I know," Bill said. "That's what Ginny said when her little brother got them. She thought if she'd reached her age without ever having them, she must be immune. And then the day before we were supposed to come back to college, she started running a high fever. When I stopped by the next morning to pick her up on the way to the station, she was broken out all over."

"The poor thing!" Joyce said with a rush of sympathy. "I know how she feels. But then, at least she got her whole vacation. I wish I'd been laid up the last day instead of the first." A thought suddenly occurred to her. "If Ginny is sick, what are we going to do about this coming issue of the *Archive*? She'll never make it back to school in time to get it finished."

"The doctor says she'll be laid up for two weeks," Bill said. "That's if everything goes smoothly and there aren't any aftereffects. And she won't be able to use her eyes for a week or so after that. Measles can be pretty hard on people our age."

"But what can we do?" Joyce asked. "Just skip an issue or try to put it together without her? I don't think we'd ever be able to duplicate her choices in stories and things. I'd really be afraid to try."

"We won't try," Bill said quietly. He sounded as though he had been thinking about it for some time. "We'll put together our own magazine, the way we want it. We'll do all the things we've tried to talk Ginny into doing. It'll be a revolution; a modern issue of the South's oldest literary magazine!"

"A modern issue!" Joyce repeated. "But Ginny . . ."

"Ginny's not here. Joyce, don't you see, this is our chance!" Bill's eyes were shining with excitement. "Ginny's stubborn; she'll never give in to trying our ideas as long as she can veto them. But now, for one issue, Ginny's out of the picture. I'm assistant editor, so I take over—that's automatic. For this issue, *I* get to state the editorial policies. And I say, let's make the *Archive* a popular magazine, one everybody on the campus will want to read!"

His excitement was catching. Joyce felt her own heart begin to beat faster.

"Some light romance—some comedy. We can use that 'Love in the Empire State Building' story we thought was so funny, the one Ginny rejected as silly. And I can choose the kind of poems that *I* like for a change—the easy, readable ones that sing along."

"And that murder mystery that we've been talking about; I'd like to try my hand at writing that myself!" Bill added. "And articles—we can have a current events piece, maybe get each of the history professors to give his personal opinion of a controversial issue. And, let's see, we could have an article on sports cars and have a mention of it on the cover; that would interest some of the fellows who've never bothered to buy a copy before."

"I know just the boy to write it!" Joyce exclaimed. "Tim Conway! And, oh, Bill, I have a wonderful idea! Let's have a pro-and-con article on sororities. Rushing starts in another week, and I bet it would be a lot of help to the poor little freshmen who are all bogged down in the confusion of rush parties. As an independent, I can write the 'con' side of it, and we can get somebody else, maybe one of the sorority presidents, to do the 'pro' side."

"Great!" Bill shoved one of the pieces of paper toward her and rolled a pencil down the table. "I've been making notes and lay-outs all morning. You get busy with your ideas, and let's see if we can't lay out a magazine that will wow them—all of them—even Ginny! Once she sees what an issue of the *Archive* can be, she won't be able to hold out against us any longer!"

It was early afternoon when they started, and by dinner time they had worked out a tentative plan. Joyce had a list of subjects for articles and people who were possible writers; Bill had accumulated from the files a pile of promising stories.

"Oh, one thing," he said as Joyce rose to leave, "I think you'd better include at least one poem by Bryan Parkley."

"What!" Joyce stared at him in amazement. "But, Bill, isn't that just what we're trying to break away from? Neither one of us can stand the kind of thing he writes."

"Still," Bill said sensibly, "that's just us—you and me. There are people who like him—Ginny, for instance, and I guess some of the other students. And we want this magazine to have something for everybody. If we use a love story and a murder mystery, we're going to have to balance it with Bryan Parkley."

"Oh, well," Joyce said, "I guess it's the least we can do, considering. Ginny's going to be upset enough when she sees what we've done when her back was turned."

For an instant Bill looked worried. Then he shook his head determinedly.

"I hope she won't be," he said. "I don't want to make Ginny mad, but darn it, Joyce, I can't let this opportunity go by! It means too much to me. It means . . ." He hesitated, and for the first time Joyce realized that there was something more behind Bill's eagerness than just the desire to revolutionize the *Archive*.

"It means what?" she prodded gently.

"It means a chance to prove myself," Bill said slowly. "To prove that my ideas about running a magazine are sound ones, that I can give people what they want, handle things the right way, build up a magazine that's worth reading, and that people will *want* to read. In other words, that I can be an editor! If I can do it with a college magazine, I'll be able to do it some day with a national magazine. I'll be able to hold my own in a field I love, and one in which I won't need legs!" His face flushed. "Maybe that sounds silly to you, making such a big production out of a little thing like this."

"No," Joyce said softly, "it doesn't sound silly at all. It sounds very sensible. And we'll make it a good issue—just wait and see if we don't!"

When she thought back on them later, the next few weeks seemed to Joyce to be the busiest ones in her life.

Never had she realized there was so much to editing a magazine. One by one she interviewed the people they hoped would do the proposed articles. With some she was successful; with others she was not.

Tim Conway, for all his enthusiasm over sports cars, did not show much enthusiasm at the idea of writing an article about them.

"I hate writing," he said. "I can hardly stumble my way through English themes. I'm nuts about sports cars, sure, to tinker with and ride around in, but I'll leave the writing about them to somebody else."

"But who else?" Joyce asked. She was beginning to find Tim a good deal less charming than he had seemed on first acquaintance. "You're the only person I know who has enough knowledge of the subject. Surely you could take off an evening to do two or three pages."

"Sorry, sweetie," Tim said, "not me. But you're wrong about nobody else knowing the subject. Lots of the guys are sports car fiends. Richie Kevers, for instance. He's driven in a dozen different races. I saw him over at the Beta House just a few minutes ago playing Ping-pong. Why don't you stop over there and talk to him?"

Richie Kevers, when Joyce approached him, was more receptive.

"Sure," he said agreeably, "it'll be kind of fun to write it. Say, haven't I seen you around before? Dating Tim, or something?"

"No," Joyce said, "I've never dated Tim. He goes steady with one of my best friends, Betty Treble."

"Oh. Well, maybe I've seen you with her." Richie's eyes were frankly approving. "Tim's girls are always knockouts; that's why I thought you might be one of them. Since you're *not* Tim's girl, how would you like to go out with me tonight? There's a bunch of us going over to Raleigh to the Circus Room. Should be fun."

Joyce shook her head regretfully.

"Thank you, I have a date already. But another time I'd love to."

"Okay," Richie said lightly, "I'll ask you again." He did not seem too concerned one way or the other.

Of all the luck, Joyce thought wistfully, as she walked down the maple-lined path that led away from the Beta House. Another opportunity to go to the Circus Room, and I can't take it! It looks as though I'm just not meant to get there.

She had a date that night with Peter Shay, the short, chunky boy who had cut in on her so often at the Homecoming Dance. She had dated him once before, an evening soon after her return from Christmas vacation, and found him a pleasant, friendly boy who was studying business administration. She had liked him. "Who could help liking him?" she had said to Stella afterwards. "He's like a friendly St. Bernard puppy, wagging his tail at everything you say to him." But the evening had certainly not been exciting.

"What do you want," Stella had said, "to have every date a Rock Hudson?"

Well, if Richie Kevers really wants to take me out, she thought now, he'll ask me again. So with a little shrug of her shoulders she went back to her editorial rounds.

Barbara Martin, president of the Panhellenic Council, promised to write in favor of sororities.

"How can anyone be against them?" she asked in amazement. "They're so much fun, and they encourage scholarship and help girls make friends and take part in college activities. I could write pages and pages. But I don't see how you're ever going to find anything to say in the other article—the opposing one."

"Oh, I think we'll manage." Joyce smiled slightly, remembering her own ordeal during rush week last year, the strain and the tears and the hysterical excitement when the bids were distributed, and the despair and heartbreak of the girls who did not get invited to join. Girls like Kathy Meadows who were unattractive or too shy and withdrawn to be able to make a good impression during the few hectic parties given them. She remembered her own indecision, the struggle of her own principles against her natural desire to be part of things, before she finally came to the decision not to pledge.

She wrote her article that night, three terse pages in which she told of her own experiences with the rush parties and the reasons for her own decision not to join. And for the dozens of freshmen who were facing rushing for the first time she added a final paragraph:

"There is something hypnotic about rush week," she wrote, "a growing pressure that builds up almost to the point of hysteria. By the time the bids actually go out, you may feel that belonging to a sorority is the most important thing in the world, and that if you don't, life will never be the same again. What you are inclined to forget is how small a part of college life sororities really are. For this one week of the year they are stressed and made to seem all-important, but for the rest of the time they are completely overshadowed by more important things—classes and parties, student activities and studies. And friendships based on common interests endure much longer than those in which people just happen to be members of the same little social group."

Bill, when she showed it to him, nodded in agreement. "That's good," he said. "It's true, and it's well stated. It's going to mean a lot to some of the poor little kids who don't get their bids this year."

Joyce nodded. "And to those who do finally get a bid, but who are so upset and confused by the whole thing that they don't know what to do about it. That's the way it was with me. But I was lucky—I had Jeff to talk to about it. I remember . . ."

She stopped, because the memory was too painful. Jeff looking down at her in that sensible, down-to-earth way of his, saying, "Sororities are just clubs. If you like clubs, fine—join one. If you don't, then don't bother with them. It's as easy as that." And after he said that, it had been easy.

Now she pushed the memories away and focused her attention on the magazine dummy before her.

"Are we about set, Bill? Do we have enough material?"

Bill nodded. "We will when Barbara Martin hands in her article. I'm pretty proud of my murder; it's got a good twist at the end, even if I do say so myself. And that sports car thing by the Kevers guy—I can't appreciate it because I don't know a thing about foreign cars. But he writes as if he knows what he's talking about, and that's what counts."

"And I've got the poetry done." Joyce gestured toward the little pile of pages at her left. "I'm including two awful things by Bryan Parkley, just for balance."

"Two of them?" Bill frowned. "Look, kid, you don't have to overdo this thing. Why not limit ourselves to one, and stick in 'Child Moving Inland' instead?"

"Do you think we could?" Joyce asked wistfully. "Ginny was so set against it."

Bill sighed. "Ginny's apt to be mad anyhow when this thing comes out. One poem more or less won't make her any madder. So let's live it up all the way."

Two days later, when the magazine actually went to the printer, Joyce was able to relax for the first time since returning from Christmas vacation.

"I never realized before," she said to Stella as she settled herself at her desk and gazed regretfully at the pile of books before her, "how much time and energy go into editing a magazine. No wonder Ginny is always so irritable! And she doesn't have the responsibility for just one issue the way we have; she just gets one to press when she has to start right in on another. I don't see how she ever has a chance to do anything else."

"You certainly haven't been doing much else," Stella said shortly. Since returning to college, Stella appeared to have become again the brisk, serious-minded girl she had been before. But there was a difference. Joyce could feel rather than see it. There was, beneath the brisk exterior, a new warmth and softness, especially since a few days ago when the first letter from Frank had arrived.

But the softness was not in evidence now as Stella glanced disapprovingly across at her roommate.

"You haven't cracked a book for days. I don't know how you're getting through your classes. It's all going to catch up with you at exam time, you know, even if you manage to scrape by now."

"I know," Joyce sighed, flipping open her biology notebook distastefully. "It isn't as bad as it appears, Stell. I was ahead in most of the courses to begin with, and this biology—well, I couldn't get much further behind than I was before. I don't like it, and I don't understand it, and I don't *want* to understand it. It's just horrible."

"It's fascinating," Stella contradicted. "There's nothing in the world as exciting as the study of life—how living things are put together and what makes them function. Besides, it's a freshman course. I don't see how you could fail it even if you wanted to."

"Oh, no?" Joyce shuddered. "Yesterday we had to cut up frogs. Ugh! I was so sick I could hardly hold the knife."

"That's ridiculous," Stella said unsympathetically. "You've cut up chickens for frying. I know because I saw you doing it at Christmas. You weren't squeamish about that."

"That was different," Joyce said quickly. "Frying chickens are—well, they're *meat.* That is, I think of them as meat. I don't know why that's different exactly, but it is. Those frogs were—just frogs. And they looked so alive with their eyes and mouths and little feet."

Stella laughed despite herself. "Joyce, you're hopeless! I guess that's just the difference between us. To me there's nothing more wonderful than seeing the way a living creature is put together, the way every organ contributes to its ability to live. Always in the back of my mind I

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keep thinking that the more I know about that, the better I'll be able to understand how to repair these organs when they break down. I suppose it's all part of wanting to be a doctor."

"Oh, you'll be one all right," Joyce said with certainty. "I don't doubt that. But for my part, I'll be happy if I just drag through this course with a D-minus average so I won't have to take it again next year."

She had been studying for only a few minutes when there was a rap on the door and Betty came in.

"Hello," she said, perching on the corner of Joyce's bed. "Are you busy?"

"We're both trying to get a little studying done," Stella said coolly, glancing up from her book. "Can't you come back and visit later?"

Betty's pretty face flushed. "I wasn't talking to you, Stella," she said. "I know you're studying; you never do anything else. It's Joyce I want to talk to." Her voice softened. "Please, Joyce, just for a minute? It's terribly important. Come on down to my room so we can talk without bothering Stella."

Joyce frowned. "I *am* trying to study, Betty," but then, at the sight of the other girl's face, "well, for just a minute if it's that important."

Once in Betty's room she stood with one hand still on the doorknob, waiting impatiently for what her friend had to say.

"Sit down, Joyce." Betty gestured toward the desk chair. "This won't take long, but I want you to be comfortable while I talk to you. The fact is, I—I want to ask a favor."

Joyce sat down, feeling a prickling of apprehension as she did so. "A favor? What kind of a favor?"

"Nothing big," Betty said, "except to me. It would mean a lot to me. And you wouldn't really have to do a thing, just let me sign out with you when I go out with Tim in the evenings. I mean on the card down in the office—let me sign your name instead of his, as though you and I were going out together."

"But, why?" Joyce asked in bewilderment. "Why bring me into it at all? There's no reason you can't sign out with Tim. There's no rule against dating, as long as you're back on time."

"But there is," Betty said miserably. "It's all Daddy's fault; he's written the dean. They're going to keep track of my card, and if I sign out with Tim they're to report it to Daddy right away."

"But, why?" Joyce asked again, feeling more confused than ever. "Why should your father do a thing like that?"

"Because he hates Tim," Betty said violently, "just hates him! And all because we stayed out late a few times during Christmas vacation. Tim's from a town just about ten miles from mine, and he came over every night, and we went around everywhere and just had a ball! It would have been perfect except for Daddy. He was awful to Tim; he treated him like a child. Every time Tim called for me Daddy would put him through a third degree about where we were going and when we'd be in and how fast Tim was to drive. Oh, it was humiliating! And when we did come home late a few times . . ."

"How late?" Joyce asked with curiosity.

"Oh, two or three in the morning. But we didn't have

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school the next day, so what difference did it make? Well, anyway, we got home late a few times, and the last time—well, that was a little later than the others, I guess—Daddy had the police out after us! I was never so embarrassed in my life! We had just stopped to say good night when up roared this big police car and threw a spotlight on us, and a policeman jumped out and asked who we were and when we told him he dragged us both home to my house. And when we got there, it was even worse. Daddy roared at Tim and called him names—an 'immature, irresponsible kid.' Can you imagine? And sent me up to bed as though I were ten years old. And the next morning he said I was never to date Tim again. And to make sure of it, he wrote the college and told them to keep track of my sign-out card."

"Oh, Betty!" Joyce sighed. "No wonder your father was angry. Why, if I ever stayed out until three when I had promised to be in early, my father would have every policeman in town out after me too. What did you expect him to do?"

"Well, not that," Betty said. "And it was punishment enough, humiliating me that way in front of Tim and the policeman. But to forbid me to date Tim—why, that's just ridiculous! I love Tim! Nothing anybody can do can keep me from being with him!"

"And you want me—" Joyce began.

"Just let me sign that you and I are going out together. To a movie or the drugstore for a soda or even to the library—it doesn't matter where. And then I'll have Tim drop me in the parking lot instead of walking me up to the dormitory, and you can meet me there, and we'll walk in together. Please, Joyce! I'll never ask another thing of you as long as I live."

"Oh, Betty, I can't." Joyce regarded the other girl helplessly. "You're one of my best friends, and it kills me to say no to you, but I can't do a thing like that. It just isn't right."

"What would be the harm?" Betty was on the verge of tears. "I'm going out with Tim anyway; nothing is going to stop me from doing that. If you let me sign out with you, it'll all go smoothly and Daddy will never know the difference. But if you don't, it will mean that I'll have to sneak out without signing, and chances are I'll get caught and expelled. That won't do anybody any good at all."

Joyce shook her head miserably.

"I'm sorry. I can't. I just can't, and I don't see how you can either. Oh, Betty, it's not worth it, it can't be worth it—breaking rules and cheating and lying to your father just to date this boy! Surely, if he's serious about you he can wait a few months until summer vacation. If you showed your father you could go along with him for that long, maybe then you could talk to him."

"You don't understand! You don't understand at all!" Betty burst into angry tears, turned away from Joyce, and threw herself face down on her bed. "Go away!" she sobbed. "Go back to your studying! I thought you were my friend, but you're not; not when it means going to a little trouble to help me! You're just like your roommate, all cold and superior."

"Betty, I'm not!" Joyce moved toward the wretched little figure on the bed. "I want to help you, I really do!

But this isn't the right way to do it. Please, try to listen . . ."

But Betty pulled away from her touch.

"Go away! Leave me alone! I don't want to talk to you any more!"

Joyce stood watching her helplessly. What could she do? There was only one person Betty would listen to now, only one person with sufficient influence over her to help. And that person was a thousand miles away, happily married and living a life of her own.

Quietly, Joyce turned and left the room.

She entered her own room and went at once to her desk, fumbled in the drawer, and pulled forth a pen and a sheet of paper.

Stella glanced up from her books. "Tackling the biology again?"

"In a minute," Joyce said. "I have to write a letter first."

She remained sitting quietly for a few moments with the pen in her hand, thinking. Then, taking a deep breath, she began to write.

"Dear Connie . . ."

10

Ginny Returns

The *Archive* was distributed across the campus the day Ginny arrived back at Denton.

"It was just our luck," Bill said later, "that she came back that day. I mean, if the magazine had been out a week when Ginny got here, the excitement would have died down a little. It would have been old stuff and nobody would have been talking about it, and the shock wouldn't have been so—so—terrific."

"It would have been pretty terrific whenever it happened," Joyce answered. But in her heart she had agreed with him. If Ginny had carefully timed her arrival for the worst possible day, she could not have hit it more exactly.

Joyce herself was not on hand when the *Archive* was distributed. It was on a Wednesday, a day when she had lab courses all afternoon. It was not until the final class was over that she had a chance to return to the dormitory, and only then did she realize that the magazine was out.

She knew it immediately upon approaching her room, for even before she reached the door she could hear Trish Nelson's deep voice ringing down the hall. "Murder! How can they call it murder? There was nothing lethal about that dose of sleeping pills in his coffee. They were enough to knock him out for a while, sure, but they would never have killed him—except that he happened to be flying his airplane at the time!"

From the number of gasps that followed, Joyce realized even before she reached it that the room was full of girls. When she stepped into the room, she was confronted with a group composed of most of the girls on the second floor, and on the foot of her own bed sat Trish Nelson, reading aloud from the copy of the *Archive* which lay open on her lap.

As she saw Joyce she waved the magazine in greeting, her face lighting up with a welcoming grin.

"Enter! One of the leaders of the *Archive* revolution! Hooray for you, Joyce! This issue is absolutely tops!"

"It certainly is!" Peggy Bennett scrambled to her feet from her place on the floor beside Trish. "Trish has been reading us Bill Johnson's murder mystery, and it's enough to make your blood run cold. What a story! It's as good as any mystery I've ever read, and I've read plenty of them, I can tell you."

"And that sorority article!" The little blonde freshman with the ponytail smiled up shyly. "It makes it so much easier to decide, hearing both sides of it like that. And you realize that whether you go sorority or not, it won't mean the end of the world."

There was a general clamor of congratulations as Joyce entered and found herself a seat on an empty corner of her own bed. The compliments were good to hear. She felt a little glow of pride spreading through her at the girls' enthusiasm.

"I'm glad you like it," she said happily. "Of course, Bill is mainly responsible. I just helped."

"You did all the leg work," Kathy Meadows said from the far side of the room. "I remember you trotting around from one person to another trying to get somebody to do each of the articles. And you wrote one of the articles on sororities yourself."

Looking across at her, Joyce realized how much her article must have meant to Kathy personally. She had not been chosen for a sorority the year before, and Joyce could remember the way she had looked when the bids came out and there was not one for her—the tight way she had held her mouth as though to keep it from trembling, and the cold misery on her plump face. Joyce's sorority article held special significance for Kathy.

"Your poem 'Child Moving Inland' is good too," Stella put in quietly. "I see you've got it in a column directly opposite Bryan Parkley's latest creation. It's good arranging; it surely points out the contrast."

Joyce smiled at her roommate. Stella was never lavish with her praise, and it meant a good deal coming from her. Besides, she was the only one in the room who was aware of the long string of frustrations that had led up to this revolutionary issue of the magazine.

"Well, we've finished the murder mystery," Trish said, laying the magazine aside and glancing at her watch. "We'd better get over to the cafeteria if we want anything to eat tonight. I think there are copies on sale there, aren't there, Joyce? You can all pick up your own copies if you want them."

The *Archive* was on sale in the cafeteria at a little table at the end of the serving line, and Joyce saw to her delight that there was only a small pile left and that almost every student in the line held a copy.

"It's surprising," she said to Stella, "that it should be selling so well already. Usually only a certain few buy copies. I wonder how everybody knew so quickly about the change in contents."

"Oh, news travels fast," Stella said lightly. "Besides, you've got that sports car picture plastered across the front; that appeals to the boys, and the little blurb about sororities gets your girl readers. It's really very cleverly planned, Joyce. You've got good promotion sense."

"I can't take credit for that part of it," Joyce admitted. "It's Bill—all Bill. He just has natural sense about that sort of thing. He's going to be a great editor some day, Stella."

After dinner, however, when she returned to the dormitory, Lyn Friche called to her from the desk.

"Joyce, you've had a phone call. Bill Johnson wants you to call him back at this number."

"All right." Joyce did not recognize the number, but it was a campus exchange and from the voices in the background when it was answered she realized it was the number of one of the boys' dormitories.

"Bill Johnson?" a voice said. "Just a minute . . ." and then she heard it calling off in another direction, "Johnson! Telephone! Sweet little female voice!" And then other voices took up the cry, sounding and resounding back and forth with comments and questions and remarks.

And we think the girls' telephone system is bad, she thought, smiling. The boys are even worse.

A moment later Bill's voice came over the wire. "Hello, Joyce?"

"Yes. How are you, Bill? Our *Archive* is really a sensation, isn't it?"

"It is?" There was an unnatural heaviness in Bill's voice. "Look, Joyce, have you seen Ginny today?"

"Ginny? No, of course not. How could I when she's home with the measles?"

"She's not home," Bill said. "Not any more. She got back to Denton this morning. The kids on the *Archive* staff say she came by the office this afternoon while I was in class. She'd had a phone call from a Mr. Shelby who lives here in Evansville and used to be an editor of the *Archive* when he was a senior at Denton. He's the chief contributor to the magazine—financial contributor, that is. The kids say they don't know what he told Ginny, but that she was crying."

"Crying? Ginny crying?" It was hard to imagine such a thing. "Oh, Bill, she must really be upset, more so than we ever thought she would be."

"You're not kidding," Bill said gruffly. "Ginny just isn't the crying type. I expected her to get mad and rage around and bawl us out. That's natural for Ginny. But not to cry. I've known Ginny for years, and I've never known her to cry about anything."

"What can we do?" Joyce asked helplessly. "I mean— it's all done; the issue's out. Besides, it's a good issue. I know it is."

"I know it is too," Bill said. "That's the one thing that keeps me from feeling like a complete heel. And as you say, there's nothing we can do now anyway." He drew a deep breath. "Well, I just wanted to check and see if you'd seen Ginny yet and, if so, what she'd said to you. She's called a special staff meeting of the *Archive* tomorrow morning at eight, so I'll see you then."

"At eight?" Joyce hesitated. "I've got a class. I guess I could cut it; I haven't used any of my cuts yet this year."

"Please do then," Bill said. "Be at that meeting, kid, if you possibly can. I'm going to need support."

Despite her best intentions, Joyce was a few minutes late the next morning, and when she walked into the *Archive* office the rest of the staff were already there. The first thing she noticed about the room was the unnatural silence. Usually in a gathering of this size there was an undertone of friendly chatter, laughter, and side remarks. Today, however, there was none of this. In the strained silence, all attention was focussed upon Ginny Boylston who was standing behind her large desk in the corner of the room.

Ginny looked terrible. Her recent illness seemed to have taken all the life out of her. Always thin, she was now a mere shadow, and her short dark hair hung lifelessly about her pale face. She looked tired to the point of exhaustion.

She should never have come back to school so soon, Joyce thought nervously. She should have stayed home and taken another week in bed. She's in no condition to handle her school work, much less run a magazine. I hope she won't start crying now!

But this time Ginny had herself under strict control. Her voice, when she spoke, was stripped of emotion.

"I've called you together," she said, "to tell you of the reaction we've received to this last issue of the *Archive*. Mr. Alan Shelby who lives here in Evansville phoned me last night. Mr. Shelby was editor of the *Archive* ten years ago, and he has always retained an interest in the magazine. It's Mr. Shelby's annual contribution that has made it possible for us to print the *Archive* the way we have on good quality paper using illustrations in color." Her voice shook slightly. "Mr. Shelby phoned last night to tell me he had just received his new issue and was horrified and disgusted. That he had never seen anything so cheap and commonplace and childish. He said he was ashamed of ever having been connected with such a magazine, and it no longer deserved the title 'oldest college literary magazine in the South' because there wasn't a thing literary about it. He said if this issue represented a change in literary policy, he was withdrawing his pledged contribution for this year."

George Carr, the business manager, glanced up quickly at this.

"You mean his whole contribution? But we won't be able to put out the magazine without it. The college itself doesn't give us more than a token allotment, and the ads don't begin to cover the printing cost."

Ginny nodded. "I know. And you should have known too, all of you. You've been working on the *Archive* all year; you know the editorial policies by this time." Her voice was growing sharper. "It's not just Mr. Shelby who's criticizing us; a dozen people have come up to me since I got back yesterday and told me how disgraceful the new issue is, and many of them are our own regular contributors! Bryan Parkley, who has had a poem in every single issue this year, told me he wasn't planning to contribute another thing. Imagine how I felt! I hadn't even *read* the magazine yet, but the whole thing is on my shoulders! I'm editor-in-chief and I'm responsible!"

Joyce squirmed miserably. As the silence heightened, she forced herself to speak.

"I'm sorry, Ginny. I guess I was one of the ones mainly responsible. It—it seemed like a good idea at the time."

"It wasn't Joyce," Bill said quietly. "I'm the responsible one. I instigated the whole thing, and if there's any blame, it should be mine. But it was a good issue; we sold more copies of it than of any we've ever published."

"It doesn't matter how many copies were sold," Ginny interrupted, "if it means we won't be able to put out the magazine again. Without Mr. Shelby's support, there won't be any magazine."

George Carr spoke again. "What can we do?"

"There's only one thing to do," Ginny said. "We have to counteract this issue immediately with an issue that is up to our old standards. We have to show Mr. Shelby that this last was just a freak experiment that won't be repeated."

George nodded. "Well, you can count on us."

There was a general murmur of relieved agreement.

"It will mean a lot of work," Ginny continued. "We'll have to make this new issue the best one ever; we'll have to prove we're worthy of being called a literary magazine. So we'll call this meeting over, and I'll expect you all in this office as soon as your classes are over for the day. We'll have to put in some concentrated work."

As the meeting dispersed, Joyce remained in her seat, watching the others leave. She was surprised at the calm with which Ginny had handled things, and also at the fact that neither she nor Bill had been singled out for criticism as she would have expected. But she did not like the looks of Ginny herself. She did not look well enough to be out of bed, much less putting in concentrated work on the *Archive.*

Bill evidently thought the same thing, for as soon as the rest of the students had left the office, he approached the desk.

"Look, Ginny, you can't handle a job like this, not right now."

Ginny, who had turned away, now turned back again.

She reached up and took off her glasses, and without them her face looked oddly defenseless.

"What choice do I have? Do you think I'd trust it to you? That's what you'd like, isn't it—to have another chance to wreck things?" Suddenly her voice broke. "Oh, Billy, how could you! The minute my back was turned!"

"Ginny, for gosh sakes!" Bill tried to spin his chair around the desk beside Ginny and snagged it on the corner. He gave it an angry shove of frustration. "Ginny, I didn't mean to mess things up for you—honest. I just thought—well, it was one chance to try out my ideas . . ."

"I know," Ginny said wearily, "you don't have to explain. I know." She was crying now, and to Joyce it was frightening. It was so out of character for Ginny to cry, and she looked so white and tired and ill.

Bill disentangled his chair and forced his way around the corner of the desk. He put an arm around Ginny and pulled her down so that her face was against his shoulder. She did not fight against him, she just crumpled up as though she had lost her last ounce of strength.

"Look, honey," Bill said gently, "we'll play it your way now, I promise. We'll put out this new issue the way you want it. We'll get the Parkley guy to write everything if necessary. But you're going to the infirmary. I don't know how your folks could have let you come back to school in the first place in the condition you're in."

"They didn't want to," Ginny said in a choking voice. "I made them let me. I—I knew the new issue was due out, and I wanted to be in on it. I wanted to make sure it was just right."

"Okay, okay," Bill said soothingly. "Don't you worry. This next one will be just what Mr. Shelby wants it to be. But you can't do it all yourself. The important thing is for you to get some rest and get feeling good again."

Joyce got to her feet, feeling suddenly as though she were watching something she had no business witnessing, a moment that was for these two people alone. She went out quietly, closing the office door behind her.

It's funny, she thought as she walked across campus toward her room, how a moment's tenderness between people who are not used to being tender can mean more, much more, than all the high-powered love making of somebody like—well, like Tim Conway. She thought about Ginny, the thin white face crumbling into tears, and she felt a miserable sense of guilt.

That's silly, she tried to assure herself, because what we did wasn't wrong at all. We didn't know about Mr. Shelby. And besides, if Ginny had been herself she would never have taken it so hard. When people are sick and run-down they break up under things that normally wouldn't bother them at all.

Nevertheless, there was a dull heaviness within her as she entered the dormitory to pick up the books for her next class. It was with relief that she found Stella sitting at the desk, bent over a sheet of paper. Here at least was somebody she could talk to about it. Stella had been on her side all along in favor of the revamped *Archive*.

"Do you want to hear the latest?" Joyce asked now. "Ginny's back and she's gone all to pieces. We're going to have to . . ."

"Can you tell me later?" Stella glanced up from her paper. "I'd like to hear, but I just got a letter from Frank and I want to get it answered right away. He's going to be making a trip with the tennis team this spring, and it'll put him in North Carolina right in time for Joe College week-end. Wouldn't it be marvelous if he could come for the dance!"

"Yes, marvelous," Joyce agreed. There was no sense trying to talk to Stella when she had something like this on her mind. "I'll talk to you later," Joyce said. "I've got to get to class anyway."

She located her Spanish book among those on the bedside table. Jeff, she thought suddenly. I want to talk to Jeff.

It was odd how it was there, this longing for Jeff. She had thought it was over. She had pushed him to the back of her mind and forgotten him; in all the past month she had hardly thought of him at all. And yet now that things were going wrong and she wanted reassurance, it was Jeff she needed with a need as strong as it had ever been.

Well, you can just forget that, she told herself irritably, because he's not part of you any more—remember?

Determinedly she tucked the Spanish book under her arm and started for class.

11

Prelude to Tragedy

Spring came early that year. The North Carolina winter was drab and wet and chilly, but as early as the beginning of March it was beginning to soften and by the end of March it was gone.

"Thank goodness," Stella said happily, "we're going to have some lovely weather for Joe College week-end. Remember how awful it was last year when they had to have the lawn concert in the auditorium because nobody could sit outside?"

Joyce nodded. "What's the latest from Frank? Is he definitely coming?"

"Yes, it's all set. His tennis trip is going to put him in North Carolina that very week-end. He may not be able to make it for the parade, but he's sure he can get here for the dance."

Stella's eyes were shining with excitement. Watching her, Joyce wished that she too could get excited about the coming events. Joe College week-end was the high point in the spring semester, a gay madcap time of foolishness and laughter, crowned by the spring formal dance. You did not have to have a date for the daytime activities, although that always made them more fun. The formal, however, was different. For it you had to have a date, or you didn't go.

So far, Joyce had not been invited, but she was fairly sure she would be. Pete Shay had been inviting her faithfully to everything that came along, and she knew he was not dating anyone else; it was just a matter of time before he brought up the Joe College events. Not that she was in any hurry for him to do so. She thought she almost might prefer staying home to dragging through a whole week-end with Pete.

So it was that when the loudspeaker boomed forth its announcement of "204—JOYCE REYNOLDS—TELEPHONE" during an evening study session, it was with no excitement that she went to answer it.

"Hello, baby, how've you been doing? I've been meaning to call you for that rain-check date, but just haven't had a chance."

The voice was masculine and familiar, but it definitely was not Pete. Joyce frowned in bewilderment.

"Who is this?"

"You mean you've forgotten me already? You just used me for a sports car article and then tossed me aside? Baby, how could you!"

"Oh." Joyce recognized him now. "Richie Kevers. I—I just wasn't expecting you, that's all."

"Not expecting me? I said I'd call, didn't I?" Under the bantering words Joyce thought he was laughing at her. "How about a date next Saturday? Or are you all dated up?"

"Next Saturday? That's Joe College week-end. No, I don't have a date yet." Joyce threw the "yet" in deliberately; there was no sense in letting this self-satisfied boy think she was worried about being asked. "Did you want to go out in the afternoon or just to the dance?"

"Oh, I don't know," Richie said carelessly. "I hadn't really thought about it. We might as well make a whole day of it though. Why don't I pick you up about two?"

It was with a feeling of pleased satisfaction that Joyce returned to her room to tell Stella.

"I have a date with Richie Kevers for the Joe College Saturday. He's picking me up at two."

"You sound pretty pleased with yourself," Stella said with amusement. "Is this an especially nice boy?"

Joyce hesitated and then slowly shook her head.

"No," she said, sounding surprised at her own answer. "No, to be perfectly frank, Stell, I don't think he *is* too nice, if by nice you mean being thoughtful and sweet. But he's very attractive in a sort of rakish way, and he's not dumb. That sports car article was a nice piece of writing. He's a kind of person I've never known very well before. He acts like he's used to having girls fall all over him."

"Well," Stella said, "he does sound like a new experience. And he'll probably give you a more interesting time than dear old Pete."

"Practically anybody would," Joyce said, "when it comes to that. Pete gets duller every time I see him."

Still it was difficult to remain hard-hearted when she was summoned to the phone later that same evening for Pete's invitation. The boy's voice sounded so hopeful and excited that it was with a touch of guilt that she said, "I'm sorry, Pete; I already have a date for Saturday."

"You do?" Pete's voice was heavy with disappointment. "Who—I mean—I know it's none of my business, but gosh, Joyce, I thought you'd know I was going to ask you."

"With Richie Kevers," Joyce said. "Do you know him?"

"Yes, I know him." He sounded surprised. "I didn't know you dated Richie's bunch."

"Oh, there's a lot you don't know about me!" Joyce said airily, and immediately regretted it, adding more warmly, "I'm sorry, Pete. Please ask me again another time, won't you?"

Plaid shirts and pedal pushers were the usual dress for viewing the Joe College parade, so this was what Joyce was wearing when she met Richie in the parlor Saturday afternoon. He gave her a quick, head-to-toe glance, grinned, and gave a low whistle.

"You've got the kind of figure that was made for slacks, baby! Come on, let's get out of this mob before we're smothered. Tim's got the car double parked out in front."

"Tim?" Joyce frowned. "You mean we're riding with Tim?"

"Sure," Richie said, "we're doubling. I probably should have called to tell you, but I knew it would be okay with you since you and Tim's girl are such pals. Have you ever ridden in Tim's Porsche? It's a real experience."

"No, I never have." Joyce tried to put some enthusiasm into her voice as she answered, but it was hard. She had heard too much about Tim Conway's car and Tim Conway's driving to make her altogether comfortable about the idea of driving with him. Besides this, there was nothing at all alluring about the prospect of doubling with Betty. Since their quarrel there had been no friendship between the two girls. Several times Joyce had tried to bridge the gap with a try at conversation, but Betty had cut her short each time and turned coldly away.

Perhaps, Joyce thought now, this is Betty's idea; maybe she's sorry about the argument and thinks a double date would be a good way of making peace again.

But this hope was completely extinguished when she climbed into the back seat of Tim's car. The nod Betty gave her was cool and her face was set and angry. Joyce realized with a sinking sensation that this double date was as much a surprise to Betty as it was to her, and just as unwanted.

Tim, however, seemed oblivious to the strained atmosphere. Evidently Betty had not told him about the argument.

"Hi," he said carelessly. "Good to see you again, Joyce. Where are we going to go?"

The last question was addressed to all of them.

Joyce regarded him with surprise. Where was there to go except to the Joe College parade? Wasn't that what they were here for?

"The parade runs all the way across campus," she said, "and then down Main Street through Evansville. I should think you could park over in front of the fraternity houses, and we could get a grand view of everything."

There was a moment's silence. Then Tim said, "Well, okay, if that's what you want to do. The parade's not going to be much, though. Those crazy floats are the same every year."

"We can look at them a while," Richie said condescendingly, "if the girls want to. And the fraternity section *is* a good place to park; we can pull out in either of two directions and we won't have to hang around for everybody else to leave."

The parade was a good one with the student marching band plus a float produced by each fraternity and sorority, most of them bright and original and amusing. Between the floats ran the clowns, members of the boys' gymnastic team, leaping and tumbling and staggering to their feet again in attitudes of mock clumsiness. To Joyce the whole thing was colorful and exciting, and she would have enjoyed it tremendously if only Tim and Richie had not seemed so bored by the whole affair. They slouched back in their seats, not even interested enough to get out of the car. Betty too showed no enthusiasm, although Joyce remembered her the year before, laughing and clapping with the rest of them and practically falling into the street in her effort not to miss a single thing that was going on.

"Had enough?" Richie asked when half the parade had passed, and Joyce swallowed her disappointment and nodded. There was no fun in enjoying a parade all by yourself when your companions were acting as though the whole thing was childish and ridiculous.

"I guess so," she said.

"I knew you would," Richie told her as Tim gave a sigh of relief and started the car. "This whole thing is so kiddish. We can stir up something a little more interesting to do with our time."

"What?" Joyce asked cautiously.

"I have a great idea." Tim pulled out of the student lot onto the main road. "They're having a sports car race this afternoon over at one of the deserted landing strips. Why don't we drive out and see what's going on?"

Richie's eyes lit up with enthusiasm. "Hey, is that this afternoon? I'd forgotten. Yeah, let's go—that is, if it's okay with the girls. Want to, Joyce? I bet you've never seen a real sports car race, have you?"

"No," Joyce admitted, "I haven't. You say it's on a landing strip?"

"On a deserted one, of course. They give plenty of room for really testing a car's speed." Tim was already applying pressure to the accelerator. "Okay with you, Betty?"

"Sure," Betty said immediately. "I'm for anything you want to do, Tim. You know that. I think watching a race would be a lot of fun."

Joyce had never had much interest in racing cars, but now, with everyone else so enthusiastic about attending the race, she didn't see any reason for being a wet blanket.

Perhaps, she thought, it might even be fun. And it would be an experience, something she had never done before. Keeping this in mind, she leaned back against the back seat, trying to relax and enjoy the afternoon drive through the green countryside.

The drive, however, dragged on longer and longer. After forty-five minutes had passed, Joyce turned to Richie in bewilderment.

"How much further is it to the landing strip?"

"Not too far," Richie said carelessly. "Tim's by-passing Raleigh so we don't hit all the afternoon traffic. Then it's only about ten miles more."

"He's by-passing Raleigh!" Joyce stiffened to attention. "But I thought you meant the race was in Evansville! I didn't sign out at the dormitory for anything but the parade. You have to get special out-of-town permission to leave Evansville on a date."

Richie was regarding her with amusement. "Calm down, baby! We'll spend an hour at the race and then drive back again. What difference does it make whether you watch a race or a parade?"

"It's against the rules," Joyce said. "You aren't supposed to leave the town without signing for out-of-town permission, and I didn't do it." She turned to Betty for support. "You didn't sign out either, did you, Betty?"

Betty shook her head. "No. This was such a spur-of-the moment thing I didn't even think about it."

"Well, what do you want to do?" Tim asked from the driver's seat. There was a touch of sarcasm in his voice. "Turn around and drive back again so you can sign? By the time we did that the race would be over. For gosh sakes, girls, loosen up and get a little fun out of life. Rules were made to be broken."

"Yeah, be a sport," Richie said. "Nobody's ever going to know the difference anyway."

"I just don't like it," Joyce said quietly. But at this point there seemed to be very little she could do about the situation. Like it or not, she was now out of town without permission. The rule was broken. Betty, sitting in the front seat with her head against Tim's shoulder, did not seem willing to give her much support. With a sigh, Joyce choked down her objections and decided to try to relax and enjoy what remained of the outing.

But the race itself, when they finally reached the landing strip, was, as far as Joyce was concerned, hardly worth watching. After the first novelty of watching cars circling a course, the race settled down to monotony.

I could stand by the side of any road, Joyce thought, and watch cars go by, and it would be as interesting as this. They don't do anything except make a lot of noise and kick up dust.

Time dragged slowly by as the race continued. Standing by the side of the track, the boys struck up a conversation with some of the other bystanders, and the talk droned on in what seemed to Joyce an unknown language about specific power output and power to weight ratio and piston speeds. The shadows lengthened and the soft spring air took on an evening crispness, and still the little cars roared monotonously around the course and the boys showed no sign of leaving.

"Are you really interested in all this?" Joyce asked Betty in an undertone.

The other girl hesitated. She glanced quickly at Tim, saw he was deep in conversation with one of the other men, and shook her head.

"No," she confessed in a low voice, "not really. But Tim just lives for it, so I go along with it and try to enjoy it. You'll have to learn to do that too if you want to keep going with Richie."

"I'm not sure that I do want to keep dating Richie," Joyce replied, "if he's as self-centered as he seems. I don't see how you can put up with it from Tim, either. Doesn't he ever think about giving *you* a good time? Doesn't he even things up by trying to enjoy the things you like to do?"

"Oh, well . . ." Betty shrugged her shoulders.

Joyce shivered and thrust her hands deeper into the pockets of her pedal pushers. Having expected to attend the parade and then return to the dormitory, she had not thought to bring along a jacket and the chill of the evening was sharp.

"It's getting late," she said aloud, trying to get Richie's attention. "Don't you think we'd better be starting back?"

"In a few minutes," Richie said impatiently. He leaned forward eagerly as a tiny gray car zoomed past them, throwing a cloud of dust into their faces. "Look at that baby go! How'd you like to drive that around school, Conway?"

"No thanks, I'll take that little Lotus over there." Tim nodded toward a car parked over on the far side of the field. "Let's walk over and talk to the owner. There's a lot I'd like to know about those little buggies."

"Okay." Richie turned to Joyce. "Come on, baby."

"I'm cold," Joyce said. "I think I'll wait for you in the car."

Richie hesitated. "Well . . ."

"Come on, Kevers," Tim said eagerly. "Let her wait if she wants to. We'll be right back. You want to wait in the car too, Betty?"

"No," Betty said, "I'll come with you. I know what this 'we'll be right back' business means."

Richie gave Joyce's hand an encouraging pat. "We *will* be right back, honest, baby. Then we'll hit the road and get you back to Denton in time to throw on a formal and zip over to the dance."

The spring formal! Settling herself in the car, Joyce realized that she had almost forgotten about it. Perhaps that would make up for the deadly afternoon and turn it into a day worth looking back on. Richie was a nice-looking boy and he moved as though he might be a good dancer. And he would look nice in a tuxedo. Of course, the idea of "throwing on a formal" and "zipping over to the dance" was not very romantic—half the fun of a dance was getting all dressed up for it—but it was surely better than not going at all.

We'll be late, Joyce thought, but I guess that doesn't really matter. Lots of people like to get to a dance after everyone else is already there.

She leaned back in the seat and closed her eyes. The sound of the cars was a dull drone in her ears; the rank smell of oil and gasoline seemed to flood the car as the fumes swept in from the course. She thought about the parade. Which float had won? It would have been decided hours ago. The girls would be back in the dormitory and getting dressed for the dance. Some of them might even have left already. Had Frank called for Stella yet? This would be an exciting evening for Stella, having an "imported" date for the Joe College week-end. Would she be nervous? It was hard to imagine Stella nervous, but perhaps she was; perhaps she needed a roommate there to buck her up with a little moral support. Too bad she couldn't be there with Stella. And Bill . . . would he be taking Ginny? Or was she still too ill to go to a big dance?

The thoughts flowed through her mind in a disconnected succession, aimlessly tumbling together to relieve the boredom of the afternoon, until finally they were not separate thoughts any longer, just a haze of color and music and moving figures which would be the dance, and then . . .

Joyce came to with a start at the sound of voices and the click of the car door being opened. She straightened up and opened her eyes to find herself staring into darkness.

"Why—it's night!" she said in amazement.

"Hey, have you been sleeping?" Richie's voice was light and amused. "How do you like that—sound asleep in the back seat!" He climbed in beside her. "Sorry we took so long. This guy let Tim try his car, and then he introduced us to another guy . . ."

". . . who introduced us to *another* guy who had *another* car," Betty interrupted coldly. She sounded more irritated than Joyce had ever heard her in Tim's presence. "I'm sorry, Joyce. I've been trying to get them to come back here for over an hour. It's just been one thing after another."

"For an hour!" Joyce strained to see her watch in the darkness. "What time is it anyway?"

"Later than we meant it to be," Richie said. Tim had already started the engine. "Where to now?"

"Let's pick up something to eat," Tim said. "I'm starved."

"But the dance!" Joyce objected. "The formal! We'll never get back in time if we stop to eat now!"

"We'll never get back in time anyway," Richie said apologetically. "I'm sorry, baby. I should have kept better track of the time."

"What do you want to eat?" Tim was being cute and charming about the whole thing. "Steak or lobster or pheasant under glass? You girls name it and that's what we'll get."

Joyce's disappointment was so great she could not even answer.

It was Betty who said, "We can't get in any good restaurant dressed like this. We'll have to look for a diner or a drive-in."

It was half an hour later before they found a diner. It was a dingy place, but it was jammed with sports car enthusiasts who, like themselves, were fresh from the race, and the boys settled immediately into a booth opposite that of a group of drivers so they could join in on the racers' conversation. Joyce sat in silence, eating her hamburger and drinking coffee. Across from her, Betty too was quiet. Once or twice their eyes met, and for the first time since their quarrel there was a feeling of sympathy between them.

There was a wall clock over the counter in the diner, and watching the fluorescent hands, Joyce began to become more and more worried about the passing of time. Finally, when the hands pointed at a quarter of eleven, she could stand it no longer.

"We'd better go," she said, pushing her coffee cup aside. "It took us a full hour to drive to the landing strip and we've come a lot further hunting for a place to eat. We'll barely make it back before midnight if we leave right now."

Tim looked up in surprise. "Before midnight? What happens at midnight?"

Joyce stared at him in amazement. "What happens? Why, that's Saturday night curfew. All the girls have to be in the dormitories by then."

Tim laughed. "For gosh sakes, do you really stick to that business? Betty's been out later than that a dozen times and hasn't been caught yet."

"I know she hasn't," Joyce said coolly. "Mainly because I've helped her climb in the parlor window. We've already broken enough rules just by coming out here in the first place."

"Isn't there an extra late curfew for the girls going to the formal?" Richie asked helpfully. "You could say you were there."

To Joyce's surprise, Betty spoke up.

"Dressed in shirts and pedal pushers? Joyce is right, we'd better start back. It *is* an hour's drive."

"Not in my car, it isn't." Tim got to his feet and fumbled in his pocket for change for a tip. "Coming out here, I was just creeping along, but you should see the Porsche when I give her the gun. Those cars in the race today didn't have anything on her!"

As they walked out to the car, Joyce digested his words with discomfort. When she was seated in the back seat, she leaned forward.

"Tim, you didn't mean that, did you? About speeding back? I—I don't like fast driving."

There was a moment's strained silence. Then Tim turned to look back at her.

"What do you mean, you don't like fast driving? You've been complaining for twenty minutes that we won't get back to Denton in time. Well, you're right, we won't if we creep home at the rate we came out here. I've got a fast car and I'm a good driver. And we're going to have to move fast if you're so set on making your precious curfew."

"I—I guess I'd rather be late," Joyce said miserably, "than have you speed back. Please don't, Tim. Betty," she appealed to the other girl, "you don't want him to either, do you?"

Betty, in the front seat, turned to face Joyce. Her face was pale and worried. She glanced sideways at Tim, and Joyce could see that she did not want to anger him with her answer, but that she too was frightened at the idea of a fast night ride back to college.

"I don't know," she said in a small voice. "I don't want to do anything dangerous. Of course, Tim *is* a good driver but . . ."

"You're so right, I'm a good driver!" Tim put his right arm around Betty's shoulders and pulled her over to him. "That's my girl, Betty, always ready for a good time." He glanced back at Joyce, flashing the quick, happy-go-lucky smile which was so much a part of his charm, except that now Joyce could see nothing charming about it. He reached over and swung open the door. "How about it, Joyce, are you riding with us or hoofing it alone?"

He was so confident of her answer that Joyce felt like slapping him. In a flash of anger she shoved forward the front seat and got out of the car.

"I'll walk," she said icily, "or take a taxi or a bus or anything before I ride with you!"

Richie, who had been taking in the proceedings silently, stared at her in amazement. "Oh, come on, baby, be a sport."

"Let her go!" Tim's anger matched Joyce's own. "It'll be morning before she gets back to college, and it'll be her own blame fault." He slammed the door.

"Tim, wait!" Betty's voice rang out in protest.

And then Richie's chimed in, "You can't just leave her out here . . ."

"She asked for it!" Tim stepped on the accelerator and the car sprang forward, swinging across the diner's parking lot and out onto the main road.

They're leaving me, Joyce thought. They're actually leaving me out here miles away from everything!

Getting out of the car had been an angry gesture. She had not really expected to be left. She choked down a frantic impulse to run after the car, to call to them to wait.

I'll find some way of getting back to college, she thought defiantly, even if I have to walk every step of the way.

The car, which had swung out onto the main road, was gone in a burst of speed. Watching it, Joyce could visualize the people in it: Tim crouched angrily over the wheel; Betty clutching his arm, perhaps crying, trying to get him to turn back; Richie—she was not sure just what Richie would be doing or whose side he would be on.

The night air was cold. With a sigh Joyce turned back toward the diner. At least inside there would be warmth and people and a telephone. Once inside, it would be easier to decide what to do.

She had taken only five steps when she heard the crash.

12

A Call to Jeff

It was sudden and loud and terrible, and the whole night shook with the sound. From where she stood with her back to the road, Joyce froze in horror. It can't be, she thought. Oh, no, it just can't . . .

She whirled and began to run back across the parking lot toward the road. The night was dark and she stumbled on the uneven driveway, caught herself, and kept on running till she reached the edge of the road. She turned immediately to the left, the way Tim's car had turned, and her panic increased. About two hundred yards down the road a street light marked an intersection, and in its dim beam, even at this distance, she could see the twisted black shape of an automobile.

"Oh, no," she whispered, "oh, no, no, no . . ."

Her heart was pounding wildly as she ran down the road. She thought she could see some movement against the wreckage.

Suddenly the road was illuminated by the headlights of a second automobile. It came up behind Joyce, passed her, and pulled up to the scene of the accident. Its doors flew open, and several people got out and ran to the twisted car. Joyce gave a strangled gasp of relief. At least there would be people to help her, to summon an ambulance if necessary, perhaps someone who knew how to practice first aid. Or perhaps—a blaze of hope shook her as she saw someone moving away from the wreckage—perhaps they were not really hurt. Perhaps the accident looked worse at a distance than it actually was.

She felt as though she had been running for hours and the distance between herself and the car seemed as wide as ever. And then suddenly she burst into the ring of light and saw for the first time what the ear-splitting crash had been. The car had veered to the right side of the road and had crashed into a telephone pole.

There were already a number of people gathering. Two more cars had pulled up, and a group of people were standing around the Porsche. One man was inside the car, kneeling on the front seat and leaning over into the back. Joyce could not see what he was doing, but she could see that the whole right side of the automobile was crushed in. The right side—the side on which Richie and Betty had been sitting!

"Betty!" The word trembled on her lips, but when she tried to speak it, no sound came. She tried again, clutching at the sleeve of a man who stood by the door of the car. "Betty!" This time the word came in an agonized cry. "Where's Betty? What's happened to her?"

"Betty?" The man turned to her. "Is that the girl? Do you know these people?"

"Yes," Joyce answered. "I was with them. I got out back there at the diner and they came on without me. Betty—the girl—where is she?"

"Over there." The man nodded toward the far side of the car. "My wife's with her. We got her out, but we're afraid to move her until the ambulance comes with stretchers."

Joyce pushed past him and ran to the other side of the car. There on the ground a woman knelt beside a limp figure. With a little gasp of horror Joyce sank down on the ground beside them. She could not see Betty's face, but she recognized the plaid shirt and pedal pushers Betty had been wearing.

"Is she—is she badly hurt?"

The woman beside her did not raise her eyes.

"I don't know," she said. "I'm not a doctor. She's got a nasty cut on her forehead and she's unconscious. She must have gone headfirst into the windshield."

"She grabbed my arm!" It was Tim's voice, cutting through the haze of horror. "She grabbed my arm and said, 'Please go back, go back for Joyce.' I had just reached the intersection. Everything would have been all right if she hadn't grabbed my arm."

Lifting her eyes from Betty's still form, Joyce saw Tim sitting on the ground a few feet away. She got up and went over to him.

"Are you all right?" she asked.

"I don't know," he said dully. "My arm's bleeding. I guess maybe the windshield cut me too."

He moved his arm, and Joyce could see a spot of blood on his sleeve, but not a great deal. Other than that he did not seem to be seriously hurt; just shocked and frightened.

"That man in the car," she asked, "what is he doing?"

"He's getting Richie out, I guess."

"Richie?" Joyce had forgotten Richie. "Is Richie still in the car?"

When Tim did not answer, she crossed to the car and spoke to the man in the front seat.

"Is there someone in there?"

The man answered without moving from his kneeling position. "Yeah, poor kid. The whole side of the car's caved in on him. It'll take more than a crowbar to get him out of here."

"Oh, please," Joyce tried to see past him into the car, "is he conscious?"

"Yeah, he's conscious. But you'd better keep out of here. It's not the kind of thing for a kid like you to see."

"But I know him!" Joyce exclaimed.

"Oh! Well, in that case . . ." The man moved aside, letting her squeeze in beside him.

He had said that Richie was conscious, but Joyce could see at once that he was only partly so. His eyes were closed, and he was groaning and rocking slowly from side to side.

"Richie?" She called his name, bending as close to him as she could. "Richie, it's Joyce!"

The boy mumbled something in answer, turning toward her as if finding comfort in the sound of her voice. He was lying flat on the seat, as though he had just stretched out to take a nap. His hair was unruffled, his shirt neat and immaculate, without a scratch apparent, but at his waist the side of the car caved in over him, twisting about him in an encasement of metal. Joyce could not see his legs at all, but she could see that there was no place where they could be extended in a normal position.

He was mumbling the same words over and over in a choking voice. What was it? Joyce bent closer, trying to hear.

"What is it, Richie?"

She was completely unprepared for the voice that answered, for it was not the sophisticated Richie Kevers. It was a little boy's voice calling through the darkness, "Mother! I want my mother!"

Somebody put hands on her shoulders and drew her out of the car.

"Better move, lady," a deep voice said gently, "and let the Highway Patrol take over. We'll get your friend out of there all right."

Joyce saw through her tears that the man beside her was in uniform. She nodded and moved aside, rejoining the woman with Betty.

"Can I do anything?" she asked helplessly. "Anything at all? Help carry her or anything?"

"I'm afraid not. I'm doing what I can to control the bleeding." The woman spoke briskly and with authority, as though she were used to handling emergency situations. For an instant Joyce almost hated her for her cool efficiency. How she wished now that she had paid more attention when Randall was learning first aid for scouting and had tried to teach her some of the fundamentals. She could remember there were places you pressed to stop bleeding, but she could not remember exactly where they were; and there were things about tourniquets and bandages and giving or not giving stimulants. If only she knew!

But this woman knew, and Joyce was thankful.

Now, as though realizing the way she felt, the woman's voice softened. "You can do something if you want to. Try to round up some blankets or coats, anything to cover this girl. She's suffering from shock and she should be kept warm."

Grateful for something to do, Joyce moved away through the crowd. There were half a dozen cars parked along the side of the road by this time, and there would have been more if a uniformed policeman had not been standing in the road, waving traffic by. Some of the owners stood by their cars, and Joyce managed to round up two lap robes and several sweaters and jackets which she carried back. The woman spread them neatly over Betty.

With a chill of apprehension, Joyce gazed down into Betty's still face. It was white and motionless, partially covered by a makeshift bandage which looked as though it had originally been a man's white T-shirt, but was now stained dark. There was something about her absolute stillness that terrified Joyce.

"Is she—are you sure she's . . ."

"She's alive," the woman said gently. "Her pulse is strong. It's just the blood that makes her look so terrible." She nodded toward Tim who still sat motionless several feet away. "Take one of those lap robes over to him."

Mechanically, Joyce did so. Tim did not move as she laid the robe over his shoulders. He sat as though in a trance.

"Lie down," Joyce said. "You'll feel better." Some memory of Randall's first-aid course came back to her, something about the state of shock. That must be what Tim was in now—shock. Putting her hands on the boy's shoulders, she eased him backwards onto the ground. He offered no resistance and did not react at all as she pulled the robe across him and tucked it around him.

It was only a few moments later that the ambulance arrived. It came with a glare of lights and the scream of a siren, and with it came stretchers, blankets, and white-coated young men who moved efficiently into the chaos, cutting for the moment the sense of horrible unreality. Joyce moved aside as a stretcher was lowered next to Betty and two men lifted her gently onto it. One of them, noting the blanket, said, "Thank goodness somebody had sense enough to do that," and Joyce was glad that she had contributed something.

The woman who had been attending Betty quietly disappeared into the crowd. Moving back toward the car, Joyce saw that it was now empty. Evidently the Highway

Patrol had succeeded in freeing Richie's legs. The last white stretcher was being loaded into the ambulance and its door was being shut.

"Let me go too!" The realization suddenly swept over Joyce that they were leaving. "Let me go to the hospital with you!" But it was too late.

The engine started and the ambulance pulled out onto the highway. And then only emptiness remained.

The car was a black mass of twisted metal against the telephone pole. A policeman was standing beside it, making notes in a small book. The other policeman was still handling the passing traffic. The crowd was dispersing quickly. Suddenly, Joyce realized that she felt sick.

It's late, she thought, fighting against the rising nausea. It must be after midnight.

She walked over to the car and spoke to the policeman.

"Do you know what time it is?"

He glanced at his watch. "About one-thirty, miss. Are you here by yourself? Would you like a ride somewhere?"

Joyce said, "I—I don't know." Her legs felt very weak. "I—could you take me back to the diner? Is it still open?"

"It's open all night." The policeman put away his notebook and took her arm. "Are you okay? You look pretty shaken to me. Why don't you let us take you home?"

"I don't want to go home," Joyce said. "I want to make a phone call."

"All right, if you're sure you're okay."

She let herself be steered over to the police car. The drive back to the diner took only a minute. Once inside, the telephone was visible at the far end of the diner on a stand against the wall.

I can walk down there, Joyce told herself firmly. I know I can.

The whole floor seemed to be swaying beneath her as she moved forward. She reached out her hand and lifted the receiver to her ear. Long distance. It would have to be long distance. She felt in her shirt pocket. Her hand closed gratefully over some coins. A quarter and two dimes. Enough for a call to Evansville.

The phone rang twelve times before it was answered. When at last it was, the voice was gruff and irritated and thick with sleep. But it was familiar—dear and familiar—even though she had not heard it for such a long time.

Out of the whole dormitory, she thought, out of all those boys, he is the one who happened to get up tonight to answer the phone! It seemed like a miracle.

"Jeff?" she said, and now suddenly her legs stopped shaking and her voice came almost naturally. "Jeff, there's been an accident. Please, please come right away, I need you."

13

Surprise Visitor

"What is it," Joyce asked in a low voice, "that makes a hospital smell so different from any other place? I could be led blindfolded into a hospital, and I'd know where I was just from the way it smelled."

"It is a unique smell," Jeff agreed. "A combination of ether and disinfectant, I guess. Let's see, Betty's room is 211, isn't it? I think that's what they told us downstairs."

"It must be that one at the end," Joyce said. "The one with the nurse standing in the doorway."

The silent corridor and the hospital odor and the sight of the solemn-faced nurse in her immaculate white uniform served to increase Joyce's feeling of uneasiness. She wanted to see Betty, see her and hear her voice and know she was all right, and at the same time the very idea of it filled her with cold dread. What would it be like, seeing this pert, bright-faced girl lying limp in a hospital bed? What could she say to Betty and what, after all that had happened, could Betty say to her? Or perhaps Betty would not want to see her at all.

It was two whole days since the night of her frantic phone call to Jeff. Their conversation then had been brief. Jeff had not pressed for details when she told him of the accident. He had merely said, "Are you all right?" and then, "Where are you?" and finally, "Okay, just stay there. I'll come for you."

It was astounding, Joyce thought afterwards, the feeling of calm that came over her when he said those words. "I'll come for you." Jeff would come. The knowledge steadied her in a way that was unbelievable. She replaced the receiver on the hook and walked back to the counter and seated herself on a stool and ordered coffee. When the coffee came, she drank it quickly and ordered more. Somebody had left a newspaper on the stool beside her and she picked it up and read it, forcing herself to concentrate on what she read. She watched the driveway for the lights of an approaching car. Jeff was coming. As soon as he could, he would be here. It was something solid to hold on to.

It was over an hour before he appeared in the doorway, but it was evident he had wasted no time in leaving the dormitory. His face was pale. The dark stubble on his chin showed he had not paused to shave, and he had evidently thrown a jacket on over his pajama top.

"You're all right?" he asked as they shut the door of the diner behind them and stood together in the dark parking lot. "You're sure you're all right?"

"I'm fine," Joyce assured him. "Honestly. I wasn't even close when the car hit the telephone pole. I got out at the diner and Tim was driving off without me."

"Thank God!" Jeff's voice was gruff. He did not touch her. He just stood there beside her and there was a funny, grating sound to his voice. "Thank God you got out of there!"

"Yes." Joyce reached over and touched his hand, and to her amazement she found it was shaking. "Jeff," she said uncertainly, "what's the matter? I told you I'm all right."

Suddenly she felt his hands on her shoulders, gripping them so tightly they hurt. His voice was hard, his sentences disjointed.

"So help me, Joyce, if you ever do a crazy fool thing like this again . . . I warned you about Tim Conway's driving; you knew perfectly well how dangerous it was. And then coming over here with him in the middle of the night . . ." His fingers were like steel biting into her shoulders. "If you ever pull a stunt like this again I'll—I'll . . ."

"You'll—what?" Joyce asked weakly. She had never seen Jeff so angry before, and it frightened her almost as much as the accident itself. "Jeff, please, you're hurting me!"

"I'll—I'll . . ." Jeff continued, and then suddenly he let go of her. "I don't know what I'd do," he finished brokenly. "But, oh, Joyce, please . . ."

Then his arms were around her so tightly that she could feel the pounding of his heart, and with a sob of relief Joyce buried her face against the rough material of his jacket and began to cry.

"Jeff," she whispered, "oh, Jeff, I'm so glad you came." She relaxed and let him hold her, secure in his closeness and strength. Jeff is here, she thought. Jeff will take care of everything. It was not until she had cried herself out and raised her face to his that she realized that there were tears in his eyes too.

He released her quickly and pulled the back of his hand across his eyes. Then he opened the door of the car.

"Hop in," he said in an almost normal voice. "Where do you want me to take you, back to Denton?"

"No, to the hospital." Joyce climbed into the car and waited for him to get in beside her. "It's where I should have gone in the first place except that I was too rattled to think about it in time. Wait—first maybe I should phone the dean at Denton. There's a phone in the diner."

"I took care of that already," Jeff said, starting the motor. "After you called, I phoned your housemother and gave her the story. She was pretty worried anyway because it was way past curfew and you and Betty hadn't checked in. I told her I was coming for you, and she said she'd phone the hospital in Raleigh right away about Betty."

Joyce could not restrain a shudder as the car passed the scene of the accident. The Porsche was still there, a useless heap on the side of the road. Jeff saw it too, and his mouth tightened, but he only said, "The hospital isn't far from here. We should be there in just a few minutes."

It was morning when they finally left the hospital and turned back toward Denton. Tim, they had been told, had only minor injuries and would be released later that day. Richie was more seriously hurt. His legs had been broken in several places and he had received some stomach injuries. Betty was suffering from loss of blood, a broken rib, and a badly cut face.

"At least," the doctor told them, "her eye is all right. That's a miracle, considering the circumstances. She must have gone face-first into the windshield, and how that glass could slice down the side of her face and miss her eye is something we'll never know."

"Is she . . ." Joyce could hardly force herself to ask the question. "Is she going to be all right?"

The doctor nodded. "Of course, she's going to have a pretty bad scar, but she's a lucky girl to be escaping so lightly." He gave Joyce a sharp look. "What was behind the accident, anyway? You kids hadn't been drinking. What could have made the driver swerve off the road that way, and why would he be going at such speed across an intersection?"

"He was angry," Joyce said. "And we had just been to a sports car race. He was bragging about how fast *his* car could go."

"Oh." The doctor shook his head. "Fool kids! You should see the number of them we get in here—kids who should never have been allowed behind the wheel of a car. Plenty of them aren't as fortunate as your friends have been. There's nothing wrong with sports cars, but a car is only as good as its driver. And a good driver is one who uses his common sense."

He spoke violently, but when he turned again to Joyce his eyes were kind.

"You look worn out." He nodded to Jeff. "Take her home, son. She's had a hard night."

Now, two days later, Joyce stood in the hospital corridor, staring at the door marked "211," and the doctor's words came back to her. "Of course, she's going to have a pretty bad scar." Betty with her bright pixie face and the fresh, young prettiness which she took so for granted. Did she know about the scar? And about Tim? Tim had been released from the hospital the previous day and had returned to Denton just long enough to collect his belongings before he left for home. There was talk among some that Tim had been expelled; others thought he had left of his own accord. But no matter which was the case, he had not been to see Betty.

Jeff had learned this when he encountered Tim leaving the dormitory with his suitcases and had asked him how Betty was.

"All right, I guess," Tim had told him. "I haven't seen her."

Jeff had been worried. "You mean they still won't let her have visitors? Have complications developed?"

"No," Tim had said, "not that I know of. I—I just thought maybe it would be better not to see her." He had not been able to meet Jeff's eyes. "The doctor said she was all marked up. I'd hate to see her that way. Betty was always so pretty. I—I mean . . ."

"I know what you mean," Jeff had said curtly. "You don't have to explain it." And he had turned sharply away. "I had to," he told Joyce later. "If I'd stood looking at that guy one more minute, I would have hit him."

So Tim had not seen Betty once since the accident, and now he was gone and probably would never see her again. To Betty this might be harder to bear than anything else.

It was with a feeling close to relief that Joyce heard the nurse say, "I'm sorry, but if you two are here to visit Miss Treble, you will have to wait. The doctor is in with her now, changing the dressings. Won't you go down to the waiting room at the end of the hall? I'll let you know as soon as she's ready for visitors."

"All right." They were just ready to turn away when the nurse spoke again.

"While you're waiting, wouldn't you like to see the Kevers boy? He hasn't had any visitors since he got here, and his room is only two doors down."

Joyce hesitated. "I suppose we should. Jeff . . ."

"You go ahead," Jeff told her. "I don't know the guy, and it might be pretty awkward meeting him like this. I'll be in the waiting room."

When she first saw him, Joyce's impression was that Richie was asleep. He was lying very still with his eyes closed, his face strangely white and young looking against the hospital pillow. Before she could step out again, however, he opened his eyes. His face brightened when he saw her.

"Well, hello!"

"Hello, Richie." Joyce moved to the foot of his bed and stood looking down at him, wondering what to say. It was not as though she knew him well, and the short association they did have was not especially pleasant to look back upon. Then suddenly she remembered the way he had looked, lying there in the back of the car, frightened and hurt, and calling for his mother, and a wave of sympathy swept over her.

"How are you, Richie?" she asked gently. "Does it hurt very much?"

He shook his head. "It's not too bad. They have me pretty well doped up, I guess. The doctor says he thinks I'll be able to walk all right, but it's going to take a long time. Have you seen Betty?"

"Not yet," Joyce said. "I'm going to in a few minutes."

"Well, tell her I'm sorry," Richie said wearily. "About everything, the whole evening. I wasn't driving, but I could have held Tim down if I'd wanted to. I should have; I knew that at the time. I guess I was afraid he'd think I was chicken." His voice faded off and then he raised his eyes to meet Joyce's. "I'm sorry about the way I was with you too. I shouldn't have let Tim drive off like that. I guess I deserved everything that happened to me. Did you get back to college all right?"

"Yes," Joyce said, "a friend came for me. He took me home."

It had been a long drive back to Denton, but it had seemed like a short one. Remembering it now, Joyce experienced again the sense of peace that she had felt as she leaned back against the seat, her eyes on the sky ahead which was touched with the first faint flush of dawn.

They had talked a lot on that drive back to Denton. Exhausted, yet strangely peaceful, Joyce found herself telling Jeff everything—the feelings that had led up to pretty silly thing to break up over. But it was a kind of test question. I'm going to be a doctor, Joyce. That's the most important thing in the world to me. This right now is my training period; whether I'm a good doctor or a poor one is going to depend a lot on how hard I work during these next few years. Until that night I thought you understood that. Then I saw you didn't." He paused. "It was expecting too much, of course. After all, you're a sophomore, not a grad student. You want to go out a lot and have a good time, and why shouldn't you? But I realized then that it couldn't be with me."

"You mean that's why you didn't call me?" Joyce asked. "Because you thought we'd have more arguments about the same thing?"

"Well, wouldn't we?"

Joyce bit her lip. "I suppose so," she admitted in a small voice. "But not now. I grew up a lot tonight, Jeff."

"Did you?" There was warmth in Jeff's voice but a hint of amusement as well. "Well, I'm not sure that's too good a thing either, honey—growing up too fast. But—well, I'm glad you called me. Awfully glad."

He reached over and touched her hand for a brief moment. But in that touch there was a sense of closeness.

All this came back to her now as she stood at the foot of Richie's bed, looking down at him. Then, with an effort she forced it to the back of her mind and turned her attention to the boy before her.

"Have you heard anything from your parents, Richie? I know the college must have notified them."

"They're driving down. I got a telegram last night." Richie's face took on a look of conscious sophistication.

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"Not that they need to, of course. I can manage all right without my mother hanging all over me, treating me like a little kid. But by the time the telegram came, they'd already left."

"Oh, it will be good for you to see them," Joyce broke in gently. "Even if you don't actually *need* them here." She realized with amusement that Richie was not in the least aware of having called for his mother the night of the accident.

"I guess it will be," he said now, keeping his voice very casual.

Joyce smiled at him. "I have to go now. Is there anything I can do for you or bring you or anything?"

"No, thanks." Richie said. "Thanks for coming. And —I *am* sorry . . . about everything."

"I know," Joyce said softly. "So am I."

A surprise awaited her when she returned to the waiting room. Glancing quickly around for Jeff, she found him in the far corner of the room deep in conversation with a girl sitting next to him. She had her back to the doorway, and all Joyce could see as she entered was a width of neat gray suit and a blond ponytail. But there was something in even that brief glimpse—something in the shining hair and the lift of the head—that brought recognition even before she turned.

"Joyce! Oh, it's so good to see you again!"

"Connie!" Joyce was across the room in an instant. "Connie Jones! No, I mean Connie *Basler!* Where did you come from? How did you get here? I can't believe you're really here—I just can't believe it!"

Connie burst out laughing.

"You look so surprised, Joyce! What did you expect after that letter you wrote me about Betty? Why, you scared me out of my wits! 'Dear Connie: Betty has been going wild since you left college. She thinks she's in love with a boy here and she's breaking rules to see him and is going to get into terrible trouble; and you're the only one who can influence her!' " Connie sobered suddenly. "But you were right, weren't you? She has got into terrible trouble. I guess I didn't make it quite soon enough with my 'influence.' "

"But you're here now," Joyce said happily, giving the tall blond girl a quick hug before dropping into a seat beside her. "It will mean so much to Betty. How on earth did you know to come to the hospital?"

"I went to the college first," Connie explained. "That's where I learned about the accident, so of course I came as quickly as I could. I tried to get in to see her, but the nurse wouldn't let me in yet. So I came down here to the waiting room, and who should I find but Jeff! He's been telling me all he knows about how it happened."

"Then you know all that I do," Joyce said. "I haven't seen Betty yet myself." She paused and then remembered to ask, "How is Ray? Did he come with you?"

"No," Connie said, "he couldn't take the time off from his job. He did want to, though; he's almost as fond of Betty as I am. She and I were roommates for so long . . ." She stopped talking as a nurse appeared in the doorway and motioned to them.

"Are you Miss Treble's visitors? It's all right to see her now. The rules are that patients can only have two visitors at a time, though."

"That's all right," Jeff said easily. "You girls go ahead. I'm sure she'd rather see you two than me."

Betty, when they did see her, looked even worse than Joyce had expected. Her head was swathed in bandages, and the tiny figure in the hospital bed seemed pathetically like that of a child. Only the dark eyes peering out from beneath the mound of bandages looked bright and familiar.

"Joyce," she said in a small voice, "I . . ." And then she saw Connie. A flash of wonder crossed her face. "I don't believe it. I must be having hallucinations or something."

"You're not," Connie said quickly. "I'm really here. And what do I find? You in the hospital." Her voice was gay and teasing, just as it had always been in the past. Joyce was sure that she alone caught the brief start as Connie first took in the pitiful little figure before them. "Can't I even turn my back on you long enough to get married without your getting yourself into trouble?"

"No, I guess you can't," Betty said soberly. "I'm just talented that way. Are you in town for long, or just going through? Are you staying at the college? Oh, what I wouldn't give to be out of here so we could really settle down for a gab session."

"I'm—passing through." Connie said slowly. "I'm just here for today."

"Well, don't hang there like a couple of vultures!" Pathetic as she looked, Betty was still definitely Betty. "Sit down, both of you, and tell me everything that's been happening. Do you realize, Connie, that I haven't seen you since your wedding almost a whole year ago!

How does it feel to be an old married woman? Is it as wonderful as you thought it would be?"

"More wonderful," Connie said promptly, seating herself on one of the chairs next to the bed. "That is, in most ways it is. And in some ways it's harder. It's—well—being married is a so much *bigger* job than I ever dreamed it would be."

"Bigger?" Joyce was surprised. "That's a funny word to use."

"It is," Connie admitted. "It doesn't quite fit, but I don't know how else to say it. There's so much more to it than you think beforehand. I'm amazed sometimes to think how little I knew about Ray when I got engaged to him. Why, all I knew really was that I loved him and he loved me!"

"What do you mean, 'all'?" Betty stared at her in amazement. "What else is there to know? Isn't loving somebody the only important thing?"

"No," Connie said slowly, "it isn't. It's just as important, I think, to *like* him."

Betty was looking at her friend as though she thought she had gone crazy.

"Connie Jones—I mean, Basler—do you mean to tell me . . ."

"What I mean," Connie continued, "is that romance is just a part of marriage. Living with somebody day after day is a greater part, and that's when liking is important. I like so much about Ray! The sort of easy-going way he has; he never gets angry. I can burn up dinner or forget to iron his shirts, and he says, 'Oh, well, we'll survive,' and tries to make *me* feel better. He's always so sweet with me; everything that's important to me is important to him. And he's so much fun. We like to do all the same things, and doing them with Ray makes me enjoy them twice as much. Sometimes in the evenings we don't do anything but sit and read, but just having him in the room makes that fun too." She stopped, suddenly embarrassed. "I didn't mean to make a speech."

"Please go on," Joyce said softly.

Connie hesitated. "What I'm trying to say is that marriage isn't one long date the way you might imagine it beforehand. It's housework and cooking and saving pennies for furniture, and seeing each other at all the unromantic times like when you've got a cold in the head and when you're brushing your teeth; and it's getting bored sometimes because you can't go all the places you used to go; and all those things make it bigger instead of smaller, because *you're* growing bigger. Together. Does that sound too silly to you?"

"No," Joyce said quietly, "it doesn't sound silly at all. It sounds pretty wonderful. And Ray must be a grand husband to make you feel that way."

"He is!" Connie's eyes were glowing. "And do you know that . . . Betty, what's the matter? Are you in pain? Do you want me to call the nurse?"

Joyce turned quickly to look at the girl on the bed. To her surprise she found Betty had turned away from them and raised her hands to cover her face. Now, at Connie's question, she lowered them quickly but still did not turn her head.

"No, don't call anybody," she said in an odd, choking voice. "Nothing hurts. I—I just . . ."

"Just what?" Connie looked worried. "Betty, what is it?"

"It's Tim," Betty said brokenly. "You don't know Tim, Connie. He's the boy I've been going steady with all year."

"I've told her a little about him already," Joyce inserted clumsily.

"Well, all the time you've been talking," Betty went on miserably, "I've been trying to picture Tim the way you're describing Ray—sitting home with him every evening because we couldn't afford to go any place, having him see me when I looked awful, burning dinner and having him laugh about it. And it doesn't fit. He doesn't fit."

"Oh, honey . . ." Connie started to interrupt, but Betty continued.

"He didn't even come to see me after the accident. Not once. I heard him outside the door one time talking to the nurse. He asked her if I was going to be badly scarred. Can you imagine that—not even sticking his head in the door—just asking if I was scarred? And the nurse said I probably would be and didn't he want to come in to see me, and he said no, he didn't have the time. He was on his way back to Denton, and he had a taxi waiting."

"He sounds," Connie said bluntly, "like a complete heel."

Betty was silent a moment. Then she said, "I suppose he is. I've been so much in love with him, I guess I've never stopped to think about whether I liked him or not. I guess really he's—he's not much worth liking, is he?" Suddenly she turned so that she was facing Connie and her eyes were brimming over with tears. "If you had a scar, Connie, on your face—a bad one—do you think Ray would still love you? Do you think there are boys who can love a girl even if she's not pretty?"

The question was so sudden and so pathetic that Joyce felt a wrench at her heart.

"Of course," Connie said immediately, "many, many of them. All the ones worth having. Let me tell you about a girl I know in Ray's home town. She has a birthmark, a huge red one which runs all the way down the side of her face and neck. The first time I saw her was at a dance, and I thought how tragic it was for a pretty girl to be so disfigured. And then I saw the man she was with. He looked like a Greek god! And the way he looked at her, she could have been the most beautiful girl in the world. There was a steady stream of men coming to their table. Every time one man brought that girl back from the dance floor, there was another waiting to claim her. Her escort even looked a little upset about it. I asked Ray about her, and he said that she was a wonderful person, sweet and amusing and fun to be with, the kind of girl who 'makes a man feel good.' I said, 'It's too bad about that birthmark, isn't it?' And Ray said, 'Birthmark? Why, yes, I guess it is. You know, I'd completely forgotten she had one.'"

They were all silent a moment after Connie's story. It was Betty who spoke first.

"Tim wouldn't have forgotten," she said. There was no emotion in her voice. She was merely stating a fact. Tim would not have forgotten.

"No," Connie agreed, "perhaps he wouldn't have. But a man who wouldn't—well, he wouldn't be good enough for her in the first place." She leaned forward eagerly.

"Don't you see, Betty . . ."

Betty nodded slowly. There was a new firmness in her voice.

"Yes, I see."

Joyce got up quietly and moved to the door.

"I have to go," she said, "Jeff is waiting for me." The two other girls waved good-by to her and turned back to their conversation. Joyce stepped out into the hall and drew a deep breath of relief.

Connie's here, she thought gratefully. Thank goodness! I knew everything would be all right if Connie were here. I wish she could have come sooner, but at least she's here now when Betty needs her most, and with her to lean on, Betty will be all right.

She walked slowly down the hall to the waiting room. Jeff was the only person there when she opened the door. He was seated in an armchair, reading a magazine. He had settled himself comfortably, leaning back in the chair, with his legs crossed as though he were prepared to wait there patiently all day if necessary. When Joyce entered, he laid the magazine aside and untangled his long legs and got slowly to his feet.

He smiled at her.

"Everything okay? How about going out somewhere for a hamburger before we head back to college?"

Joyce stood there a moment looking at him, at the stubborn chin, gentle mouth and warm, dark eyes. It was a moment before she answered, and when she did it had nothing to do with the hamburger at all.

"Jeff, I like you," she said softly, reaching out her hand for his. "I do *like* you so much."

14

Worth the Waiting

The *Archive* was placed on sale around the campus at ten o'clock on a Monday morning, and by three that afternoon every issue was sold.

"We've never had such a sellout before!" Ginny Boylston's eyes were shining. "We could have printed lots more copies if we had only known!"

Ginny looked better now than she did when she first returned to Denton after her illness. At Bill's insistence she had reported to the infirmary and been granted cuts in her classes for a week, and he personally had seen to it that she ate good meals and was back in the dormitory by eight o'clock every night.

"I can't force you to go to bed at that hour," he had said grimly, "but at least I can see that you're in the right area. Then if you don't get a good night's sleep, it's your own fault."

"You act as though I were ready to fall to pieces," Ginny retorted. "For goodness' sake, Billy, all I've had is the measles! I'm not going to collapse every time somebody breathes on me."

Nevertheless, there was a pleased little lilt in her voice. Joyce, who was working in the *Archive* office at the time and overheard the conversation, glanced up in amusement. The words had been sharp ones, but there was a gentleness in Ginny's expression that belied them.

"No." Bill must have caught the expression too, for there was an answering gentleness in his own voice. "I don't suppose you are, but I'm not going to take any chances on it."

The one thing he could not prevent her from doing, however, was turning out the new issue of the *Archive*. To Ginny this was the most important thing in life right now, and nothing was going to keep her from doing it. Since he could not prevent it, Bill did the next best thing by taking as much of the load as possible off her shoulders. It seemed to Joyce that he spent every waking hour that wasn't class time in the *Archive* office.

"How can you do it?" Joyce asked him once as she stopped by the office to pick up a pile of poetry submissions. "After turning out an issue like that last one, how can you make yourself work so hard on this? Oh, Bill, it's so frustrating, especially when everyone seemed to like our last issue so much!"

"Everyone?" Bill shook his head. "Our friends, maybe. But evidently not as many people as we thought. And not the right people. Who would have thought that Shelby fellow would feel so strongly about the whole thing?" He sighed. "Oh, well, we had our turn at bat and we struck out. I guess my editorial instincts aren't as good as I thought they were."

"They certainly are!" Joyce said loyally. "You'll be a wonderful editor some day. And if you want to try another issue like the last one, I'm right with you. We might try talking to Ginny again."

"No," Bill said, "we've had our try. We did enough damage with it. There's no sense getting Ginny all upset again. No, our job now is to go ahead the way she wants on this issue. After all, she's the editor. I just don't want her running herself to death on it."

"If you say so." Joyce accepted his decision with a sigh. "I guess I'd better fill up the poetry spaces with Bryan Parkley then. By the way, is Ginny still dating him?"

Bill shook his head. There was a twinkle in his eye. "Not since the Homecoming Dance when he kept her trapped in a corner all evening discussing 'the deeper things in life.' That didn't take so well with Ginny. She admires deep thinking but not at a party when she's wearing a brand-new formal and wants to show it off."

"Which leaves the field pretty much open, doesn't it?" Joyce prodded gently. Then, impulsively, she put a hand on his shoulder. "Oh, Bill, when are you going to break down and tell her how you feel about her?"

"Okay, okay," Bill said gruffly, "in my own way, in my own time. Just don't worry about it, little matchmaker."

"Bill Johnson," Joyce exclaimed in exasperation, "you're hopeless!"

But Bill only laughed and turned back to the page of lay-outs on the table before him. "By the way," he said casually, "seems to me I saw you and a certain Jeff MacGreggor eating lunch in the Dope Shop the other day. Is that romance going strong again?"

Joyce nodded slowly. "I think it is. I—I'm not entirely sure, but I think so." And with this confused reply she gathered her pile of manuscripts into her arms and departed, leaving a puzzled boy staring after her.

As she walked back to the dormitory, Joyce had to smile thinking of it. What a ridiculous answer to a sensible question? "Is that romance going strong again?" "I'm not entirely sure, but I think so." No wonder poor Bill had looked confused. And yet it was in all honesty the only way she could have answered him.

She had dated Jeff several times since the night of their reunion in Raleigh. They had gone to dinner twice and once to a movie, and they met at odd moments on campus to catch lunch together in the Dope Shop or to study together in the library. But as far as steady dating was concerned, Jeff did not seem to want that.

It was he himself who brought up the subject of the Pied Piper Show.

"I know it's Friday night," he said, "but I just can't take you. Dr. George Russell, the famous heart specialist, is going to give a lecture that same night, and I can't miss it."

Joyce fought down her disappointment.

"That's all right," she said. "I don't mind missing the show. I really don't. I know the lecture is important to you." She felt very adult as she said it—very mature and self-sacrificing. Despite herself she glanced up to see if Jeff was impressed with her.

He was frowning. "That's silly. I know you want to see it. After all, you wrote all the songs for the show last year; you're bound to be interested in what this year's writers have turned out. Has anybody else asked you to go?"

"Oh, yes, Pete Shay did." Joyce laughed. "Pete always asks me to everything. I'll have to tell him I won't be dating him any more."

Jeff was silent a moment. Then he said, "I think you should date him, Joyce. You should go to the Pied Piper Show with him. And when other guys ask you to things, you should go ahead and accept them."

Joyce stared at him in hurt amazement. "But, Jeff, I thought you and I—I mean, after the other night . . ."

"Look," Jeff said softly, "what I said the other night about its not being good for you to grow up too fast—I meant that, honey. You're a sophomore. You should be having fun and enjoying all the parties and dances college has to offer. I wish I could be the one to take you to all of them, but I can't, and there's no sense in your sitting alone in the dormitory while everybody else goes out. That's crazy."

Joyce tried not to sound as hurt as she felt. "You mean you don't even mind my dating other boys?"

"Of course, I mind." The hurt must have showed through, because Jeff's voice was very gentle. "I wouldn't be human if I didn't. But I'd mind more knowing that I was keeping you from all the fun of college." He reached over and touched her face, very gently, tilting her chin up so that he could look down at her. "Anything worthwhile will stand a little testing, won't it? And if it won't, it was never worth having in the first place."

"I guess so," Joyce said falteringly. "I guess so."

So she had dated Pete Shay for the Pied Piper Show, and she had since had dates with several other nice boys. But not one of the dates was as exciting as even a five-minute stroll across campus with Jeff.

Though Jeff was too busy to see her very often, Joyce found the weeks racing by. Term papers became due, final exams loomed on the horizon; and, of course, there was the rush job on the *Archive*. Although her job was still defined as Poetry Editor, Joyce found herself assuming more and more jobs because Ginny was still not up to par. It was with a breath of relief that she came into the dormitory the day the magazine went on sale and flopped on her bed.

"It's done," she said wearily, "finished. Ginny's comeback issue. That just leaves one final one to go before the semester is over, and by that time Ginny will be back on her feet and able to handle her usual load of work. My goodness, I don't see how she, or Bill either for that matter, ever gets anything else done."

"Did you bring a copy back with you?" Stella asked.

As usual she was at her desk, but today for some reason she did not seem too interested in the book propped up in front of her.

"No," Joyce said, "I didn't. I was sure there would be dozens of copies left over. There always are. But this time Ginny tells me we've sold every single one."

"I bet Ginny's pleased with herself." Stella shoved back her chair and walked over to the window. "Isn't it beautiful outside? Everything seems so green and fresh. What's it like in Florida in the spring?"

"Oh, sort of a minor version of a northern spring," Joyce said carelessly. "Flowers come out and it gets warm. There isn't the same contrast though, because you never have a really cold winter." Suddenly she smiled. "What's the matter, Stell—got spring fever?"

"You could call it that, I guess." Stella sighed. "I wonder what Frank's doing at the University of Florida right now. I wish he wrote longer letters. I love getting them, but he never seems to want to waste space telling me all the things he's been doing and how he feels about them and—and things."

It was the first time Joyce could remember hearing Stella expose her emotions so completely. Why, she must really care a lot for Frank! More than I ever imagined.

Aloud she said, "He writes you every week, doesn't he? That's better than he ever did with me. And besides, letters aren't Frank's strong point. You have to be with him really to appreciate him." She hesitated a moment, her own words giving her an idea. "Why don't you come down for a visit this summer? We could have so much fun, and Frank's sure to be there."

Stella's face lit up. "That would be wonderful! It would have to be at the very end of the summer though, so I would have had enough time to work and save the money for train fare."

Joyce frowned. Another idea was taking form in her mind, one too perfect to hope for and yet—it might be possible.

"If Jeff were to come too," she said slowly, "you could drive down with him. Just think, Stell—you and Frank, and Jeff and me—what a wonderful time we could have!"

Stella's eyes were shining. "Oh, Joyce, wouldn't that be perfect! Do you think Jeff would really come?"

"I'll ask him tonight," Joyce said excitedly. "But I think—I'm almost sure—he'll *want* to come if he possibly can. And even if it just turns out to be for a week at the end of the summer, it will be more than worth it!"

Their plans were interrupted by a sharp rap at the door, and before either girl could answer the door swung open and Trish Nelson marched into the room.

"Where," she demanded without introduction, "is this month's mystery story?"

"Mystery story?" Joyce was bewildered. "What mystery story? I don't know what you're talking about."

"In the *Archive,* of course!" Trish cried belligerently. "I could hardly wait this morning to buy the new issue, that last mystery was such a good one. I thought you were going to run them as a regular monthly feature. So out I dashed between classes to spend my hard-earned quarter on a magazine, and what did I find inside? A story about a little boy who built a sand castle and found a dead fish inside it."

Stella burst out laughing. "A dead fish? Honestly, Trish? What on earth would make anyone write a story like that?" She turned to Joyce. "Even Ginny couldn't have thought a dead fish was literary."

Joyce flushed, feeling an odd sense of loyalty for the magazine she represented. Even if she didn't agree with the editorial policies, still she was undeniably a part of them.

"It isn't that bad," she said defensively. "They're all supposed to be symbols—the child and the castle and the fish. They represent innocence and creative ambition and—and . . ."

"And a dead fish." Trish shook her head solemnly. "Don't bother trying to explain it; no matter what it symbolizes, it's terrible. At least to me it is. What happened to the mystery story? And the crossword puzzle, and all the interesting articles?"

"This," Joyce explained wearily, "is the South's oldest college literary magazine. That last issue was a fluke, a crazy kind of experiment. We're back to the old *Archive* again."

"Well, I'm ready to go marching out to get my money back," Trish retorted. "That was the most worthless quarter I've ever spent. And there are plenty of others who feel the same way. Peggy and Lyn bought copies too, and Kathy Meadows, and just everybody! They took one look and dumped them into the wastebasket."

"Oh, Trish, you're exaggerating," Joyce said, "you must be."

But when she walked over to the cafeteria that evening she found that, if anything, Trish Nelson had been conservative in her statement. Everyone she passed had some comment to make about the *Archive,* and she actually could not get through the cafeteria line without stopping and making explanations and answering questions.

"This is the real *Archive,*" she explained a dozen times. "The last issue was just an experiment. We got terribly criticized for that last issue." But her words might have been falling on deaf ears for all the attention that was paid to them.

When she got back to the dormitory after dinner she found Bill Johnson waiting for her.

"Hi," he said, "I stopped by for you. There's an emergency meeting of the *Archive* staff at seven o'clock."

"An emergency meeting?" Joyce was beginning to hate the very word *Archive.* "Bill, I'm sorry, but Jeff's coming over tonight to give me some help with my biology. We're going to study together."

"Ginny said to tell you it would be a short meeting," Bill said. "You'll be back in plenty of time to do your studying. She said it was really important."

"Well," Joyce relented, "all right. But it had better really be short. I've spent more time than I can afford on *Archive* business lately, and besides, there's something important I want to discuss with Jeff tonight. Something Stella and I thought of just this afternoon."

Dashing off a hurried note to Jeff, she pinned it to the dormitory bulletin board and set off with Bill toward the English building.

As Ginny had predicted, the meeting was a short one. The usual group of staff members was gathered in the office when Joyce and Bill arrived. Ginny, perched on the edge of her large desk, gave them time to get settled and then began to speak.

"I think you will all be interested to know that we sold more copies of this issue of the *Archive* than we have of any other. We sold out completely. For the first time in history, the *Archive* came close to paying for itself."

There was no pride in her voice when she made the announcement. Joyce regarded her with surprise. This surely should be Ginny's big moment. Why wasn't she gloating over the sudden surprising sale?

But Ginny had not finished. Her next words were uttered in the same expressionless tone of voice.

"This wasn't the triumph it might seem. We sold all those copies under false pretences. It seems the people who bought them thought they were buying an issue like the last one, the one you put out while I was away. When they found we had gone back to our old policies, they were disappointed. Some of them were downright mad. I've heard it everywhere on campus, and I'm sure you have too."

She paused. Surprisingly, it was Bill who spoke up.

"You can't please everybody, Ginny," he said in a matter-of-fact tone. "Somebody's always going to criticize you. That's one of the things an editor has to get used to."

Ginny nodded. "I know that. But we do have a choice of *who* criticizes us. We got a few criticisms of the last issue and one of them was from our benefactor, Alan Shelby. But this time we got hundreds, and they were from the students—the people who are our real readers. I heard a dozen students say they will never buy an

Archive again. And if people don't read a magazine, what's the sense of publishing it?"

She raised a thin hand and pushed back a lock of hair from her forehead. For the first time since Joyce had known her, Ginny sounded unsure of herself.

"I haven't changed, if that's what you're all thinking. I still think the *Archive* should be a literary magazine. I like it the way it's always been. But—well, I'm beginning to realize that lots of people don't. Maybe I'm not as good an editor as I thought I was. I—I don't quite know what to do." She gazed appealingly at the group before her. "We have one more issue to publish before the end of the year. It will be my last issue; I'll be graduating. But most of you are juniors and one of you is just a sophomore. It's you who will be putting out the *Archive* next year. I guess maybe it's up to you to decide what kind of a magazine you want the last issue to be."

There was a moment's silence. Then a voice asked, "Do we have any choice? Aren't we dependent on Mr. Shelby for the money to go on publishing?"

It was George Carr, the business manager, who answered.

"We always have been in the past. But if we could count on selling regularly as many copies as we did this time, it would be another story. We'd have such a good circulation that I'm sure a lot more local business people would want to buy ads. Then, if we used a slightly cheaper paper and cut down on the color illustrations—I bet we could be pretty much self-supporting!"

There was a murmur of comment around the room.

George's enthusiasm was contagious. Ginny, from her perch on the high desk, nodded slowly, accepting the inevitable.

She said, "We'll have to vote. Will everyone in favor of accepting a new policy and producing a 'popular' style magazine, please signify by raising his hand? Now, all in favor of keeping the *Archive* the way it is?"

There was no question as to the answer.

"All right." Ginny did not even bother to count the hands. "We've made the decision. Now, the usual policy at the end of the year is for the retiring editor to appoint a successor for his job, somebody to take over with the first issue the following fall. I'd like to rush things a little and turn over the position of editor-in-chief right now to our assistant editor, Bill Johnson. He has better ideas on publishing a popular magazine than I have, and I know he'll do a grand job."

Bill raised his hand. "Ginny, don't be silly. You're editor-in-chief! There's no reason to step out of the picture just because . . ."

"I'm not stepping out of the picture," Ginny interrupted. "I'll take over your job as assistant editor. I'll do everything I can to help you, but I can't start fresh with ideas for a new *Archive*. I'm too used to the old one. I wouldn't even know where to begin." She smiled, a half-shy little smile that brought a whole new look of warmth to her face. "Please help me, Billy."

"Well, okay," Bill said. He looked pleased and unaccountably flustered. "If you really want me to."

"So—I guess that's all." Ginny slipped down from the desk, signifying that the meeting was over. "Thank you for coming on such short notice. We'll see if we can't make our new magazine a grand success!"

On her way out of the room, Joyce was stopped by Bill calling to her. "Hey, Joyce, wait a second! If I'm going to be editor-in-chief, let me hand out my first assignment. How about doing a couple of poems for our final issue?"

"You mean, write them myself?" Joyce hesitated. "I'd like to, Bill. I'll see about it. I'm not quite sure what to write about."

"Something simple," Bill said. "And fresh. After all, it's spring; let's make this a spring issue." He grinned at her. "What about a couple of love songs? They shouldn't be too hard for you to turn out right now."

He was teasing, but Joyce didn't mind. The fresh spring evening drifted in through the office window, filling the whole room with a drowsy sweetness. Outside the warm twilight was softening into dusk. Over at the dormitory she knew Jeff was waiting for her, sitting in the parlor probably with a book open in his lap, glancing at his watch and frowning a little and turning back to the book again.

He was waiting for her now, and there would be times—many, many times to come—when she would be waiting for him. It would not be easy always, waiting. But Jeff's own words came back to her like a promise, strong and reassuring. "Anything worthwhile will stand a little testing, won't it? If it won't, then it wasn't worth having in the first place."

And this is worth having, Joyce thought now. The knowledge was deep within her—a quiet, indisputable certainty. This is very much worth having. In a warm glow of happiness she found herself echoing Bill's laughter.

"What do you mean, 'a couple of love songs'? Save me a double-page spread, right in the middle of the magazine. I'll fill it up for you!"